

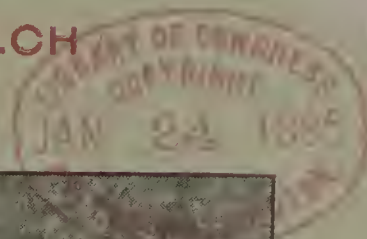


..HULDA..

A ROMANCE OF THE WEST

(DAVID OF JUNIPER GULCH

By MRS. L. H. SHUEY



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DAVID OF JUNIPER GULCH



Hulda was the Tomboy of the Village.

David of Juniper Gulch.

HULDA

A ROMANCE OF THE WEST

(DAVID OF JUNIPER GULCH)

BY

LILLIAN SHUEY

Author of "CALIFORNIA SUNSHINE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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CAST OF THE STORY.

MAX ROYSE.....Mining and Real Estate Agent.
MRS. MINERVA ELLIS.....Lodging-house Keeper.
SAM.....Chinaman, servant of Mrs. Ellis.
MR. JOSEPH CORNMAN.....Pedagogue.
HICKS.....Stage Driver.

DAVID STRONG.

HULDA HARDY.

MRS. HARDY.

GRANDPA AND GRANDMA BEVERLY.

CIS BEVERLY.

MILLIE BATES.....School-girl.
BUCK DORMS.....School-boy.

EDWARD LA GRANGE.

AURELIA HAWTHORNE STALKER.

THE REV. GRACEWAY AND WIFE.

MR. AND MRS. WOODS.

THE "BATESES" AND THE "DORMSES"

MRS. MARKHAM.

SATSUMA, { Servants of
DONOVAN, { Mrs. Markham.

DAVID OF JUNIPER GULCH

CHAPTER I.

HULDA AND DAVID.

In the placer regions of California in the little mining town of Hardup, there lived, at the opening of my story, Mrs. Thomas Hardy and her only child, Hulda, a girl of eighteen years.

Hardup, like many of its inhabitants had seen better days, as many of its mines had been worked out and abandoned.

The paying mines, that were being developed at this time, were owned by established Hydraulic companies; many of the citizens of the old placer town being employed as laborers.

The people of the county were finding out that fruit could be cultivated on the pleasant hills, and in the open valleys, and that the country was desirable to live in, as well as to cut to pieces with mining operations; and so Hardup lived on dreaming of its old prosperity, and hoping for better times when they would be justified in painting up their houses and repairing their old stores and churches.

Hardup lay in a diversified valley, forest covered mountains rising on the south and east, and lower

brushy hills on the west. The children of the town, knowing nothing to fear in the pine woods, were wont to troop in a body to the mountains and forests on Saturday, there to grow brown and rugged, chasing the birds and rabbits, and seeking fruits and flowers.

In the springtime were the sweet pink manzanita blossoms, the white mountain lilies, the mariposa lilies and the rare tiger lilies; these last always in rocky and almost inaccessible places.

In summer there were the manzanita-berries, elder-berries, June apples, wild grapes, goose-berries and thimble-berries.

Later the hazel-nuts and pine-nuts lured them to longer tramps in the hot, still afternoons. Always as they played and rambled, they sought for the nuggets of gold that they never found but they were laying up, nevertheless, treasures of health and inspiration.

The Methodist church annually sent to Hardup a minister who lived on a very small salary, abetted by much self-supplied hope and grace. There were many vacant houses in Hardup, and the little unpainted church looked old and worn, with but fifteen years of service.

Thomas Hardy had come to Hardup in the days of its prosperity, and, being ignorant of the ways and workings of California mines, had been led into speculations till he had lost all his capital. His little cottage home, and ten acres of unimproved land back of it, not being considered property of any value in those days.

One morning while handling a heavy stream of water in a great rubber hose, the pipe slipped from his cold hands, and, whipped under the falling bank by the whirling monster, he was hurried to his death.

He had been overseeing a large force of laborers, and was justly beloved by them. The days of warm-hearted, impulsive deeds among the miners had not yet departed, and a week after the funeral, several men in rubber boots tramped into the widow's house, and laid a little book on Mrs. Hardy's table. "It's in the bank at Forest Grove," said the spokesman, "It's a thousand dollars. We thought we owed it to him, us and the company, ma'am, for he was the best boss we ever had."

These good people recognized that Mrs. Hardy had neither the courage or ability to support herself. Gentle in manner, and of the most refined habits, she had no power to successfully enter the money-making openings for women at that time. After some reflection she concluded to accept the gift. She knew, as the miners well understood, that all her husband's money had been lost in starting the mines there, and it was generally regarded by herself and others as an act of justice, inspired by those who had reaped a great harvest from his hazardous sowing.

The town also began to improve at that time; a schoolhouse was built on the flat below the widow's cottage, and the school-teachers sometimes came to board with Mrs. Hardy. With the plain sewing that came in abundance to her hand, Mrs. Hardy lived a quiet and unambitious life devoted to the memory of

her husband, to her church, and to her plain and unworldly friends of the Methodist persuasion. When Hulda was eighteen she knew nothing of the world except as she saw it in the church society of Hardup.

She was a plump, fair girl in perfect health, but with undeveloped tastes, and crude ideas of the world and its ways. To an ordinary observer there was nothing very interesting about the girl. Her dark, fine glossy hair, too thick to be becomingly arranged, hung in a long braid to her waist. With her strong brown arms, she milked the cow, and gathered the fruit from the young orchard. Her most attractive features then, were her perfectly shaped brown eyes and a broad white forehead hidden by her drooping hair. The crimson on her cheeks and lips was covered by a brown tint of tan painted there by California sunshine. At fourteen years of age, despite her mother's gentle protestations, she was known as the Tomboy of the village. She led the other girls far up the deep recesses of the cañons, and used to plunge on alone far beyond where the others dared to go. There was no place so dear to her as the rocky hills, and she littered the house with rocks, canes, and other trophies of her rambles. She transplanted mountain vines and trees into the yard, and had collected specimens of every kind of rock and mineral found in that region. At sixteen she had ranked as the first scholar in the village school so long, that she begged to be allowed to remain at home and work in the garden. Then she fell to reading till she had read every book in the village; a

motley collection, but which included, however, many historical works and standard novels. She had been instructed in the languages according to the various tastes of the teachers, who had boarded there. One had started her in French, one in Spanish, and one more practical, gave her a good start in Latin.

Hulda well knew that her wild-wood wanderings and reading habits were not approved of by the women of the town. She was a "Tom-boy," a "no-account," and a "good-for-nothing," because she could neither crochet nor make her own dresses; the knowledge of orchard trees and their culture not being supposed to be, at that time, of any actual value for a girl. Mrs. Hardy had no power to make Hulda otherwise than as she was. So Hulda wore her simple calico dresses to church, read, dreamed, and rambled in the hills, till the town gossips ceased to think of her as a possible belle, bride and housekeeper of Hardup.

The wandering writing school teachers, peculiar to the country at that time, had made an excellent scribe of the girl to the envy of all the other ruddy boys and girls, and from these writing teachers she imbibed the idea that she might earn something for herself by her "rapid and smooth-flowing pen." She then took a few pupils, and a strong desire to become a money-earner began to fill her mind. By her eighteenth birthday she realized that if she ever had more books and better clothes she would have to earn them herself.

Her mother kept the money she had received from

the miners intact in the bank, and with stubborn economy had refused to draw anything but the interest. It had never occurred to her frugal mind that the education of her daughter might be of far greater value to her than the money; she saw in that capital alone a sure protection from want. The money was deposited in the bank at Forest Grove six miles away, and Hulda's sole experience with the outside world lay in her trips to that place to draw the interest and make their frugal purchases.

In stormy weather when there were not likely to be many passengers, Bill Hicks, the stage driver, frequently called for her to insist on her occupying a seat in the empty old stage with which he made daily trips between the two towns. Hulda seldom refused to climb in the roomy stage, that had seen better days, and better service in the times of Hardup's prosperity. The harder it stormed and the more dangerous the roads were, the more keenly the girl would enjoy her ride, and the more Bill Hicks enjoyed the company of his perfectly fearless companion. It was on one of these trips in stormy December, that she met with an adventure very likely to happen to a girl of such simple habits and utterly unsophisticated training. The stage was ready to start on its evening trip home and Hulda was sitting in one corner with her feet on the mail bag, when Hicks put his head in the door.

"Hulda," he said, "I s'pose you'd a heap rather ride alone, but this is a pretty decent looking chap. Guess you won't mind him after you ride a spell. If

it warn't raining so hard I'd make the old cub ride on the box. Yes, sir, this way, sir."

The stranger got in and the stage rolled out of town.

The stranger was a nervous, restless man and sat first on one side of the stage and then on the other. He frequently buttoned and unbuttoned his overcoat and adjusted his vest. Hulda watched him with curiosity for she had never seen any one at all like him. She judged he was not a minister, he was too healthy looking and there were too many newspapers sticking out of his pocket. He frequently took off his hat and looked into it, and then she would see an abundance of disordered hair. In the meantime he had taken an inventory of the dark-eyed country girl, and presently he said:

"Have you any objection to my smoking a cigar, miss?"

"Oh no, no, sir, not at all," replied Hulda honestly. She had always spoken civilly to every one she had met on those trips.

"Thank you; you are a lady," he said with emphasis, lighting a mild cigar. "I suppose you live about here."

"Yes, sir," said the girl, "at Hardup."

"Ah, indeed. I expect to stop at that place a day or two. I bought a mine there last week. Ran up to see it. I suppose you know all about mines, ah—Miss—"

"Hardy," said Hulda, simply.

"Ah, yes. I suppose your father owns extensively."

"O, no, sir, my father is dead."

"Well, indeed." He threw his cigar from the window and leaned over the middle seat manifesting new interest. He noticed her plain dress.

"Then I suppose you are a school marm, or going to be."

Hulda flushed guiltily. For the first time she was ashamed for not being anything in particular. She thought of her writing pupils.

"No, sir, I teach writing," she said, "but I have only a few pupils."

"Yes, yes, I see," continued the stranger, getting more patronizing and fatherly, "that is a pity. If you are a good scribe, you could do much better than that in San Francisco, much better. I know girls there who are earning very good wages writing in offices." He produced a blank card from his vest pocket.

"Now just for curiosity suppose you wrote on this card with this pencil. If you can write well, it is possible I might aid you to get a situation. I like to see girls ambitious."

The stage was standing still just then for Hicks to deliver a parcel at a farm-house, so she took the card and wrote on it rapidly one of her writing school copies. "Live a life of truth, sobriety and honor," and returned it with an air of just pride.

"Beautiful, beautiful, Miss Hardy," exclaimed the stranger. "There would be no trouble about your getting a position. If you wish to come to the city I will gladly aid you."

"I would have to talk to mother, answered the girl.

"O, yes, of course. Don't do anything rashly. Here is my card, and you can write to the city and get references in regard to my character and business. You will find it all right. I am responsible for what I say. I might call in and see your mother, if you wish. O, is this where you live?" The stage stopped at the cottage and the man sat back in silence while Hicks helped Hulda out with her packages.

Hulda burst in on her mother who was cooking supper in the little kitchen, in a wild state of excitement.

"Mother, mother, I have had an adventure." She dropped her packages on the floor while she took her cloak and hat from her warm figure and flushing face.

"Well, well, shut the door and calm yourself," expostulated the mild little mother, "and tell your story straight if you tell it at all."

Hulda gave her the card and they read:

Max S. Royse,

Land & Mining Agent,

231 Pearl St., S. F. Up-stairs.

"But he is a perfect stranger," she protested when Hulda had explained. "We must not depend on all he says."

"But can't we find out about him, mother," insisted Hulda; "it is such a nice way to earn money."

"But you don't know anything about the city, child. It is a dangerous place for young girls."

"But Cis Beverly is there, mother."

"Yes, I know—well, well, set the table, Hulda, and we will talk about it in the morning."

The next day Max S. Royse, Land & Mining Agent, called and made the way apparently smooth before them. He was a married man, he said, and Mrs. Royse would receive the girl in her own home for a few days. When she came down she could write him a note, and he would meet her at the wharf and take her to his house. Moreover his wife was a member of the C. St. Church and they could write to that church and obtain references as to himself and wife. It was a common thing, he said, for him to get positions for girls, and he only charged a modest compensation for his services. He was very business like and took his departure promptly with a manner of great respect.

Hulda had an unsophisticated mixture of prudence in her nature, so she said:

"Mother, let's not tell anyone, and if I succeed it will be time to tell the neighbors."

"One thing," answered her mother, "I must consult Brother Graceway and find out about these people first."

So she put on her bonnet and went to the Methodist parsonage that very afternoon.

The minister laid down his Greek lexicon, and passed his hand over a brow dignified by many years of labor in the ministry.

After giving the matter a moment's study, he said the business might be a little irregular but he could write to the pastor of C. St. Church and get all the

particulars. The answer which soon came, was very satisfactory. Mrs. Royse was a member of the writer's church. She was very active in charities and church work. Mr. Royse attended church occasionally. They lived well, and he had never heard anything derogatory to the character and influence of Mr. and Mrs. Royse.

So Hulda and her mother sat down to fix over a grey dress into a traveling costume and talk about the new prospects; and they dwelt with pleasure on the fact that Hulda could now find Cis Beverly, and report all the news about her.

One bright day they took a walk about two miles over the gravelly hills and slopes to the farm of Grandpa and Grandma Beverly.

This old couple had come to California many years previously with a married son. While the son joined in the eager search for gold the old man had cleared a little land, planted trees and made a home. Five years the son and his wife had lain in the church burying-ground at Hardup, and the old people lived in their little home, driving to church regularly in an old buggy that was weak and shaky as the old man himself; kindly and gentle-hearted old people, loving their fair-haired granddaughter, Cecelia, and training as best they could such a restive child. Every one loved Cis, a fair, blue-eyed, slender girl, who used to run over the hills to town like a young deer, and who chose her associates among the married women of the town, learning of them to sew and crochet, and dress herself like a young lady of society. She

had sweet, amiable ways and an unoffending presence, and those who loved and petted her had helped to advance her very early out of her girlhood into the tastes and desires of a young lady. At seventeen Cis went no more with Hulda on her rambles; she discarded her boy and girl friends, dressed her hair high, and wore her dresses long. According to the prevailing ideas Cis was a young lady of marriageable age, and as she was pretty and guileless it was not surprising that she had a lover, and one so well worthy of her as David Strong. David, who was teaming on the mountain grades, saw visions of her pretty face all along the brushy roads.

He bought a new Sunday suit, quietly established the practice of walking home with her Sundays after church, and Hulda grew accustomed to seeing his sturdy figure on the hill back of her house every Sunday at sunset, on his way home from the Beverly farm.

As David, though plain in his attainments, was a man of honest ability, the older heads of the community looked upon these attentions with favor.

But some giddy young matrons of Hardup talked to Cis of her being pretty enough to make a brilliant match, if she could only see a little of the world.

A certain Mrs. Black came up to Hardup on a vacation from her flourishing millinery store in San Francisco, and being a dear cousin of Mrs. Vanderlip's, the postmaster's wife, she was cordially received by the matrons of Hardup. She fell in love with Cis Beverly at once, and hoped she would not marry

that big fellow, who sat behind her in the church choir. She concluded before she went home, that she wanted just such a girl as Cis to learn to wait in her store. Cis, being fresh from the country, would be honest, and her yellow curls tied with blue ribbons, would attract customers from the street. So she went herself to the Beverly home and persuaded the old people to let Cis go with her to the city for six months. She would take her to live with her behind the shop, she said, and the girl could earn enough to buy her some new dresses.

So when David Strong had loitered about the next Sunday, waiting for Cis, he found her in the vestibule surrounded by girls and women who were kissing her good-by. Some were giving her orders for hats and dresses and some were begging curls for keepsakes. Finally seeing David waiting lonely and perplexed, they all withdrew, and she came out smiling and radiant, and walked with him over the brown November hills.

David's spirits fell when she told him of her plans, yet he felt that he had no right to oppose her going. He had made no confession of his love, and in her present happy, independent mood he knew he would be rejected with scorn, if he told her then. But after all he reflected that six months would not be long, and perhaps a little work would reduce her spirits and make her more willing to think of him seriously as her intended. So he left her with only her laughing promise not to forget him and a promise to write to him. It would have been best had she gone away

with David's kiss on her lips, and David's ring on her finger; but David's heart had been too faint. Cis was but a child in mind and heart, ready to follow any strong persuasive leadership. And Mrs. Black, who was a woman of many words, speedily forgot her promises, when she grew tired of her new pet, and let her look after herself, as did the other shop girls.

Cis had been away now over a year, and David and Hulda used to speak frequently as they stood in her garden, of Cis and her letters. They had received three letters each, and David's were like Hulda's, except that she addressed him as "dear friend," and her as "dear Hulda."

At first she said that she was homesick and would be home in two or three months. Then she wrote that she was delighted with the city, that she had been to C. St. church and was making new friends. When she had been away three months she wrote that Mrs. Black did not need her any more, but that she had found a place in a candy store. They received no more letters, but they went occasionally to Grandma Beverly to read the letters that came regularly to her. She wrote that Mrs. Black had moved away, and that she lived with her dear friend Sallie Graham, who kept house for her father on Mission Street. Then she began to promise that she would be home in a few months, but though her grandmother had looked for her all summer and winter, yet she had not come.

"Hulda," David had said one August evening, as

he stood mutilating her garden fence with his knife, "do you think I could get Cis to come home if I went down after her? The old folks are worrying a great deal." David had learned to place a great deal of confidence in this plain, slow-thinking girl during the long summer.

"No," Hulda had answered, thoughtfully leaning over the gate in the moonlight, "if you go and insist on her coming she will be sure not to. She has sent some money to the old folks and I don't think she wants to come."

"It isn't the money," David had said. Hulda did not know what it was. She did not divine his great love for her friend. Had she been a more worldly girl she might have been a better confidant. Had they both been wiser they would have been more anxious.

Soon after David went away on a prospecting tour to Nevada. When he returned he did not come immediately to the house as he sometimes did.

Hulda and her mother were talking of these things the day they walked over to the Beverly farm on the day before Hulda's intended departure.

"We will not tell them I am going down," said Hulda. "I can't afford to stay a day if I don't get a position, and if I stay I will find Cis, and write them all about her." Hulda's head was full of plans to find Cis, and persuade her to return to her old home for a time.

On their return from the farm, Hulda dropped behind her mother, for she saw, down the road, the

figure of a man with a pick and shovel. Mrs. Hardy saw it too for she called back as she hurried on: "Ask David to supper, Hulda, he hasn't been in for a long time."

"Why didn't you go on with your mother?" said David jokingly as he came up to her.

"Because you need scolding for staying away so long, and you've got to come to supper, mother says. How do you do anyway, Dave?"

"As well as I deserve to be, I suppose. Haven't had any luck, as usual. What's the news from Cis Beverly?"

"This is a pretty time to ask about Cis," cried Hulda, "been away all fall."

"There's just this about it, Hulda," said David moodily, "if I made a rich strike she'd come home soon enough."

"Oh, hush, David! Such talk!"

"May be you think I don't know anything about her." He walked on in silence for a few minutes. "Well, if it's between you and me, I'll tell you all about it."

"Why, of course I'll not tell," cried Hulda with girlish fervor.

"It's a short story and I'll tell it short," and David shifted his pick and shovel to the other shoulder.

"Well, you know I went down there the day after I was talking with you. I got to the city about nine o'clock in the evening, and I went straight to the candy store, for I had the street and number you gave me. I found the place all right, and the first thing I saw was Cis standing behind the counter busy

about something. She was dressed like city girls only she looked pale and tired. Pretty soon she looked up and saw me coming in. Hulda, she turned as white as this apron of yours. 'Why, Mr. Strong,' says she, 'when did you come down?' I was sort of dashed at her coolness, and like a blundering fool I said, 'I've just come down, Cis, and I want you to go home with me.' Then she looked really scared. 'I can't come with you, I really can't, Mr. Strong,' says she, 'but I'll come home this winter sure.' Then I lost my head. 'I suppose you'll be up on your wedding tour with some of these city fellows,' said I. 'What's that to you if I do,' says she. And she walked straight away into the back of the store. Pretty soon little miss came up to me and wanted to sell me something. I walked out of that shop and came home the next day, and that's all the good I done. If I'd a kept my temper like a gentleman, I might have got to talk to her any way. I think I'll give her up. It will be a long time before I take a shine to any more pretty girls." Hulda made no reply. She was glad David was so sensibly inclined.

"Come in to supper, won't you, Dave?" she said at the gate. "Mother wants you to, and there's no school teacher here now."

"Well, yes, thank you," responded the young man. "I'll go over to the cabin first and wash up, and leave these traps." But he did not learn of Hulda's intended departure. She knew that he would oppose it and without reason. There would be time enough to explain everything to him on her first vacation home.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOVE AND THE FOX.

It was a sunless dingy room on S— St., San Francisco. Tattered lace curtains were tied back from a dusty window, that looked out against a gray wall, leaving only at the top a little glimpse of smoking chimneys. The carpet and furniture of the room had once been elegant, but now wore an air of vanished respectability common to lodging houses from which the higher tides of opulence has ebbed away.

On the bed lay a pretty, pale little woman with a restless eager look on her face, which was just childish enough to show weakness, yet womanly enough to reveal its lines of suffering. She was fully dressed, but her fair hair was tumbled about her shoulders. She rested on her elbow and was looking into the face of a babe, that lay sleeping beside her. Then she bent down and kissed the little face with an air of timidity, and, when a quick step came to the door, she threw a cover over the babe, and sat up flushing guiltily.

A large, commanding looking woman entered the room, closed the door with a bang behind her, and placed a tray of food on the bare marble-topped table with a cold click.

"There, there" she said with an air of having authority in the case, "what are you doing now, Cis Beverly? Fussing over that baby again. Really you ought not to show such sentiment. Max hasn't put in an appearance yet, and there's no telling, may be he won't come at all." The girl sank down on the bed with a moan and a burst of tears. With a sigh and a touch of softness in her manner, the woman dusted the table, uncovered the tray, and poured out a cup of hot tea from a little brown jug.

She was a finely-formed, well-dressed woman with a very fair complexion, and fine white hands. Her face, had it been more refined in expression, would have been handsome. Her poise was queenly, and her movements exceedingly graceful. She proceeded to draw the curtain, lit the gas, and then went and laid her hand on the girl with a manner of tolerance.

"Now, Cis, do cheer up, and eat your supper. He might be here to-night, and you want to be well if he does come."

The girl sat up and smiled a little.

"Then we are going to be married right off, you know, Mrs. Ellis, and go away somewhere to the country."

Mrs. Ellis laughed musically; one might not understand what she meant by such a laugh.

"And do you really believe all that stuff, little girl?"

"Of course I do. He loves me, and I love my baby."

Mrs. Ellis silently watched the girl sip her tea, and

eat a little of her toast. She had more sympathy for her than she wished to show; and she was considering if she might dare to make a few plain statements without having a case of hysteria on her hands. After a while she said: "Cis, why not give the baby to me? I will bring it up, and take good care of it. Sometime you can come and get her and tell people you have adopted a child. See here, Cis," and she took the girl's little drooping hand in her warm, firm fingers, "don't you know that the baby will be in the way? How can he marry you and take you among his friends with a baby in your arms? Nobody would speak to you. Now you must choose between Max and the baby, and that quick too, for he will be here to-night. Now do be sensible for once."

But the blue eyes closed, the fair head drooped on the pillow, and the white face grew whiter. The girl did not faint, but she drew her hands up to her throat, and was helplessly silent. The woman folded the blankets around the little figure, which shivered slightly as she touched it. She replaced the dishes on the tray and left the room. Leaving the tray on the stand in the hall, she went on to her own apartments in the back end of the building. The hall was neat and bright, and a pleasant contrast to the dingy room she had left. A stairway at the end led to a hall below of similar size, but which was more handsomely furnished and carpeted. In the lower hall swung a tassel, which being pulled, rang a bell above. Mrs. Ellis had been proprietor of these two halls with their forty rooms for many years.

The lower hall with its more fresh and cheerful rooms, she allotted to her transient roomers, who surged in and out with the travel of the city. But the tide, as it ebbed and flowed, left a scum in the upper story of which the transient custom neither knew nor asked.

Mrs. Ellis entered a little hall that led to her own room, stopped and called sharply:

"Sam."

A door from one of the dark inner rooms opened, and a very neat, civil looking Chinaman appeared. Sam had been in her employ for several years. With the assistance of some other Chinaman, who was frequently changed, he took entire care of the rooms, besides being the cook and confidential servant of his mistress. He was always clean, wide awake, and ready for any service. He never betrayed a confidence, or ordinarily volunteered remarks. He served meals to his mistress in her little sitting-room with neatness and even elegance. He petitioned an increase of wages once a year, which was always granted. He was indispensable to the mistress of the house, and knew it.

"Sam," said the mistress, "you may take that waiter down to the restaurant, and tell them not to send up any breakfast unless I order. And, Sam, about half past seven I want a nice supper for two, coffee, an omelet, oysters, and go out and get some roses."

Mrs. Ellis then went on to her own apartment. Her sitting-room was furnished with comfortable large chairs, a rich, bright carpet, and heavy rugs. A piano

loaded with pictorial papers and music stood in a corner. Heavy red curtains covered the windows, and a large cat slept on a rug in the warmth of a cheerful coal fire in the grate. In a corner a little fluffy, yellow ball swung in a gilded cage. Mrs. Ellis brought from a closet a bottle of wine and a tray of dainty glasses. She retired to her bed-room to freshen her toilet, which was done by adding powder to her face and, draping several yards of Spanish lace about her neck. Returning, she stroked the cat which purred loudly under her soft touch. Some one tapped lightly on her door, and she opened it cautiously.

"Max, is it you?"

"Yes, Minerva, it's me. Glad to see me, I'll warrant."

Her caller threw his hat and overcoat on to the piano, and rudely attempted to kiss her cheek. She repelled him by a push that threw him stumbling into a chair.

"Now don't be a fool, Max Royse. You haven't seen me for a month, you ought to show a little respect. Sit down."

He flung himself onto the lounge, and ran his fingers through his dark auburn curls.

"There now," he said, "don't put on your company airs to a good friend like me. You know you're glad to see me."

"Yes, I have tolerated you for nearly three years now."

"Yes, and I've just got that drunken husband of yours shanghied out the harbor, and bound north after whales. Nice job, that."

"Well, haven't I paid you," she retorted, "helped you out of all sorts of scrapes? In fact your miseries have become my chief recreation!"

He laughed and took the glass of wine she had poured for him.

"Don't allude to my past miseries, please, fair one, I am a reformed man, don't you think I am pretty fair, now, honestly?"

"Yes, I suppose you are as good as the average," she said, locking the door softly in answer to a knock, and lowering her voice. "But I think this last affair is a little too bad. She's as innocent as a dove. Bad as I am, I can't bear to tell her that you can't marry her.

Royse slowly raised himself from the pillow and sat upright, his pale blue eyes wide open.

"Poor little girl!" he muttered. "How is she any way? I'd marry her in a minute if I could. I didn't mean to harm her. I wish I'd never reformed, and married that golden goddess up on California Street. But I've done well by the poor little girl. I left you money enough for everything, didn't I? Besides the handsome sum I have to give you, for managing the thing. How does she feel about the child?"

"Feel? She is perfectly unmanageable. I tried to persuade her to give it to me, but she almost fainted away."

"Now see here, Minerva," with a show of indignation, "I told you to go slow with her. Don't be rude. I want her well treated. I intend to keep her like a lady as long as stocks are up."

She laughed her silvery laugh again this time.

"Yes, I have no doubt of it, and I hope you will, Max. I believe I pity the innocent little thing."

He laughed derisively. "Pity her, do you? That must be a new disease. Have you a physician?"

"You're an antidote for anything good, Max," she retorted, "but seriously what are you going to give me for adopting the baby?"

He rose and walked around the room adjusting his disordered hair as he walked. He poked his finger at the startled canary, then rubbed his hands at the grate. It was only a question of how little he dared to offer her. He knew he could trust her to do the work. Finally he said reflectively.

"Well, you know I might manage it myself, but I will give you a hundred. You know you have drained me pretty well already, and, remember, old Ellis is a sailor."

She poured out his fourth glass of wine. "I want two hundred, Max." He drank the wine, and took a step toward her, rudely attempting to encircle her waist with his arm. She flung him away contemptuously.

"Very well, then," he said, "have things all ready at twelve o'clock to-night, and I will be here with a hack for your patient. By the way, Minerva, peerless one, don't I smell oysters?"

"Of course. Now go and see the poor girl while I fix the table. Wait, you may take her a cup of coffee." She went into the little kitchen adjoining and brought a steaming cup of odorous coffee, in a delicate china cup on a handsome little tea-tray.

"That's a darling, I knew you would treat her well," he said, as he started out with the tray.

"Here, take the key, you blundering Irishman! It's room thirteen, and be back in ten minutes.

"Ugh!" she said as she closed the door behind him. I wonder if that old fool thinks I have treated her to Haviland China and Mocha coffee every day."

When he returned she looked up anxiously from the paper she was reading. "What do you think, Max?"

"It's all right," he said, "she's as lively as the girl of the period used to be. She came to terms very quick. She'll go with me and leave the child with you. I made her think that would be all right, and that she wasn't strong enough to take care of it now."

She had spread a table in the center of the room, and the odors of coffee and oysters filled the air. He seated himself opposite to her at the table, placed a rosebud in his button-hole, and unfolded a snowy napkin.

"You're the finest woman in the world, Mrs. Ellis. Think of Mrs. Royse being so thoughtful of me three hours after dinner. O, no, she's too eminently respectable for that." But he ate hastily and rose from the table.

"Now, my peerless, if you will excuse me, I have an engagement at nine o'clock."

"What, going home?"

"No, I—I—have to meet a young lady."

"Save us alive, Max, another girl? O horrors!"

"Yes, a girl, but a rather green one this time.

Fresh from the country. She's cut out to be smart though, if she did trust herself to me."

"Oh, Max, let me beg of you, don't take in any more victims." Max adjusted his hat, buttoned up his overcoat, and began to draw on his gloves. He looked quite gentlemanly indeed.

"Don't get in a fret, Minerva, keep cool. She's not to be a victim. It's a case of pure benevolence."

"Pshaw!"

"Fact. She's coming to write in lawyer Grey's office. If she's smart enough to keep out of trouble, and stand off all my foolishness, I'll introduce her to my wife and give her a show in the world. O, I'm not altogether bad, Mrs. Ellis. I want to get a room for her down stairs. She's coming in on the nine o'clock boat."

"Certainly, she can have a room."

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips in mock courtesy, but she gave him a push and he stumbled into the hall. She closed and locked the door upon him.

CHAPTER III.

A GIRL'S JOURNEY.

On the morning of that day, Hulda Hardy had dragged her valise out into a bend in the road, and waited for the stage. She knew that if the stage was seen to stop at her house, half a dozen neighbors would be in before noon, to ask if Hulda had gone to Forest Grove, and regret that they had not known of it to have some errands done.

"Going to stay a week?" said Hicks, as he put in her valise.

"Yes," said the girl cheerily, "a week or a month, just as you like."

"Well, then, if you'll pull around about to-morrow night, I'll take you to the dance."

"Why, Mr. Hicks, you know I can't dance a step."

"I'll risk that part of it," he said as he shut the door, for it was beginning to rain, and Hulda was compelled to ride inside to save her dress.

Hicks was full of kindness and officiousness for her at the depot at Forest Grove. He boarded the train with her to find her a good seat, and staid with her until the train began to move, but through it all, he asked her no questions. He supposed, probably, that she was going to Sacramento.

As soon as Hulda looked about in the car, the first pangs of loneliness and timidity came. The people about her were unlike the people of Hardup in dress and appearance.

She was on an overland train, and the passengers were merchants, tourists, drummers, fashionably dressed women, and tired, spoiled children. They took no notice whatever of her, which was, in itself, a novel circumstance to the girl.

At a Sacramento station she waited alone, ate a lunch she had brought with her, and took adventurous little trips out to look at the broad yellow river, the steamers, scows and flat boats, and the weather-beaten town across the water.

Her loneliness increased, and when the people began to arrive for the train she expected to take, she watched them eagerly, hoping to see some one she had met at Hardup. Many of the Hardup people had moved to Sacramento.

A pleasant-faced woman, with pretty gray curls peeping out from her bonnet, and around her neck and forehead, came and sat down by her, dropping her hand-bag with a sigh of relief.

"If I only dared to speak to her," thought the girl, "she seems so nice."

But the woman presently went and bought her ticket, and when she came back she smiled upon Hulda.

"Are you going on this train, young lady?"

"I am," replied the girl with a flush of color.

"Then will you help me carry my hand-bag? I am not used to carrying it and you look strong."

"Indeed, I would be very glad to carry it, and go with you," cried the delighted girl. "I have never traveled before, and I am lonely."

"Indeed! tell me where you are from."

The woman threw off her outer wrap and veil as she sat down. She had a pretty, trim form, was richly dressed, and her face, with smiling blue eyes, was so young and sweet looking, that Hulda saw at once that her hair must be prematurely gray.

Before the train had reached Vallejo, where they were to take a steamer to San Francisco, these two travelers had become quite well informed as to each other's identity.

Hulda learned that her companion lived in Sacramento, owned houses there, and made frequent trips to San Francisco where she owned more houses; that she had come to the state at some indefinite time, she referred to, as the early days.

"And my gray hairs," said she, pointing to her curls, "came to me then, from my grief and anxiety over the loss of my first husband and child. And now I am a widow again, but not widowed as I was then, for I was all alone in the world."

When they went into the steamer she took the country girl about the boat and told her many things about it; then she took her into the ladies' cabin below, and sat down to talk quietly with her, as she had observed that the country girl was as ignorant, as she was interesting and inexperienced.

She deftly drew from her, her entire history, and the object and circumstances of the trip. She knew

that it was not quite proper for the girl to go into the charge of a strange man, in a strange city, and told her so.

But Hulda was quite sure that everything was all right. However, the elder woman gently persisted in giving her considerable good advice.

"Leave your baggage on the wharf, by all means, Miss Hardy," she said in conclusion, "and if this man does not get you the place he promises, go directly home. It is very hard for a girl to get employment in San Francisco."

As the boat neared the city the two women went up-stairs. The wind staggered them as they came on deck, but the girl cried out with an exclamation of surprise and delight; the scene before them was delighting many who had been familiar with it for years. Line upon line, row upon row of twinkling lights set in darkness. A row of many colored lights marked the wharf which they were fast approaching, and avenues of light ran in all directions till they seemed to mingle with the stars. While the boat was landing, Hulda's heart beat rapidly, and a feeling of fear came over her, when she saw the travelers hurrying off with their valises and bundles. She then began to realize the value of her new friend, and did not want to part from her. She clung nervously to her arm, as they were pressed onto the wharf with the crowd.

"Ah," said a modulated voice, "here you are! I was afraid you wouldn't come. But you have a friend with you."

Max Royse, Land and Mining Agent, clothed in the attire of a gentleman, bowed defferentially to the elder woman and held out his hand to the girl. Hulda's companion seemed to be favorably impressed with his appearance. She pressed the girl's hand reassuringly and turned to her own friends, who were crowding about her. But after she had entered a car with her friends and started away, she wished that she had insisted on taking the girl and keeping her with her for one night. She regretted her thoughtlessness, all the way to the house of her friends, and woke up several times in the night, to think restlessly about the girl.

Max Royse drew the girl's arm quickly within his, and led her through the crowd to a hack, and took her hand to assist her into it. But Hulda drew back.

"I would rather not go in a carriage," she said, "it is too expensive for me. Could we not go in a street car?"

"This is all right," insisted Royse, "get in. This is my carriage."

She entered hesitatingly. Royse followed, and the carriage started.

"Poor girl, you look tired," he said, sitting down beside her and looking impertinently into her face.

Hulda at once moved into her corner, a little disturbed by such paternal manners.

"No, thank you, I am not at all tired," she replied quickly.

He then explained to her that his wife was unavoidably away from home that night, and he had

arranged for a room for her at the lodging-house of a friend.

"She is very much of a lady," he continued, "and I think you will like to stay there. When you get acquainted you can go any where you like. Will you be afraid to stay alone?"

"O, no," returned Hulda, "but I am sorry your wife is away."

Here he removed his new beaver hat, rubbed its shining surface carefully, and replaced it.

Hulda was absorbed in the glimpses of the street lights from the carriage window, and her shawl had fallen from her shoulders.

"Pardon me." Her companion reached about her and replaced her shawl. The girl faced him with a startled look in her eyes.

"Oh," he said, civilly, drawing back, "I did not mean to offend you." She flushed scarlet.

"I am not used to receiving such attentions from gentlemen."

"Pardon me, then, but I feared you would be cold."

Hulda turned to the window with a feeling of annoyance and strange fear.

"But I must not be foolish," she thought, "the ways of the city men will be new to me, and I must pretend not to notice."

Her bewilderment increased when the carriage stopped, and she stepped out under a row of gas lights, and the noise of a theater orchestra rolled from the grates under her feet. Did his friend live there?

But she was hurried up a narrow stairway in the bright and pretty lower hall of Mrs. Ellis' lodging establishment.

Royse pulled the tassel, and Hulda looked about her, collecting her thoughts. Presently Mrs. Ellis appeared above bending over the railing.

"Oh, it's you, is it? I'll be down in a minute. Sam, Sam, the keys."

Soon she came trailing down the stairs, her keys rattling in her white fingers, and her scrutinizing eyes on Hulda.

"Your friend came then, Mr. Royse," she said, "I am glad to see her. This way please."

They followed her through a little hall into a large, and in the eyes of the country girl, handsomely furnished room.

Mrs. Ellis turned up the gas, which was already lit.

"This is Miss Hardy," said Royse, "I will leave her in your charge to-night."

"Very well," said Mrs. Ellis, taking a complete inventory of the girl in one glance. "Miss Hardy, here is your key, and if you need anything, come up to my room."

Then she went out swiftly, closing the door after her. Max sat down on the lounge.

"Well, take off your things, little girl, and rest yourself."

Now Hulda was not little, and she knew it, but she tried to conceal her annoyance, as she removed her hat and shawl. She twisted up her hair, which had escaped from its usual confinement, and remained

standing. She wondered why he did not give her her directions and go, and why he sat there looking so stupid. So she said:

"What am I to do to-morrow, and where is the office where I am to work?"

"That's all right, dear, I'll tell you all about that to-morrow," he said. "Come and sit down here and rest." He reached out and took hold of her dress. But she pulled herself away, and sat down in a chair, her heart beginning to beat strangely. He was changing every moment, and she watched him with amazement.

"Well I guess I'd better go." He rose and took several turns about the room; suddenly he seized a chair and sat down beside her.

"Now don't look so frightened," he said soothingly, "I'm not going to hurt you. Do you think I would harm you, child?"

"No, of course not," she said, trying to keep her composure, and brushing his hand from her arm, "but I do not quite understand your manners."

"Pardon me, Miss Hardy," he said gently, and moving a little away, "I do not mean offense. You know I take a great interest in you—a fatherly interest."

"I know," said the girl growing bolder, "but I had much rather be alone; I am tired."

"Oh, poor girl," he leaned forward and took hold of her arm.

Hulda sprang away towards the door, thoroughly alarmed now. Was he drunk or insane? How could

she get away without making a scene? Royse sat back in his chair and laughed.

"Why, girl, you'd make a fine actress. I believe I'll change your trade and put you on the stage. What makes you so excitable, any way? Come and sit down."

But Hulda stood by the door trembling.

"But your actions are so strange," she ventured to say.

"O, pshaw! Sit down and be reasonable. I will let you alone. I didn't know I was annoying you."

She sat down a little reassured. Was not the man recommended to her by a minister? It could not be possible that he meant harm. "He is amusing himself," she thought, "I will be calm." He reached for his hat and began to smooth it down.

"And are you going to see my wife to-morrow?"

"I expect to, Mr. Royse."

"Well, then, if you will forgive me for my rude conduct, I will go."

She smiled. He suddenly rose, came and bent over her with his arm around her.

"Well, then, kiss me good-night."

The thoroughly frightened girl sprang away with a scream, and ran to the door. She was sure then that the man was drunk.

"Don't go out," he cried, "I won't touch you."

She stood facing him, her hand on the door knob, while he sat down on the lounge and looked at her with half closed eyes. She remembered the advice of the kind lady on the boat, and her mind began to

fill with undefined terrors. He had lost all resemblance to the man she had supposed him to be; and yet in her innocence she had not enough fear to lose her composure. She thought of the woman's advice, "Go home if you see anything wrong," but she thought she had best speak, as if she saw nothing wrong.

"You had better go now, Mr. Royse, and if you come in the morning and take me to the office you spoke of, that is all I expect of you."

He threw himself back on the lounge with a sneer.

"Indeed, do you think I am going to get work for a young lady that has insulted me?"

"O, sir, I have not."

He laughed.

"I expect some return for my kindness."

"What?" she cried, wonderingly.

"Well, be a little friendly and affectionate, you know. Kiss a fellow once in a while."

"If that is the case," she said struggling against her fears and her anger, "I do not need your services, for I shall never do anything of the kind."

He sprang up, angry then. He knew he had not meant all his conduct implied. He had thought to do right by the girl, but he had had a good deal of wine that evening.

"Very well," he stammered, "if you order me out, I shall have to go. If you want me, let me know."

He walked out the door that she opened for him, and she quickly shut and locked it after him; but he stood there a few minutes and then tapped lightly. She opened the door a little, holding it firmly.

"I am sorry I was so rude," he said softly. "Please forgive me. Don't be angry; you'll get used to me after a while."

"I don't think so," she answered, in a trembling voice.

"Never mind, I'll call for you at ten o'clock tomorrow. Will you be ready?"

With a faint "Yes" she closed the door quickly and locked it. He tapped hesitatingly several times, but receiving no reply he stood in the hall a few moments, and then ran up-stairs to the apartments of Mrs. Ellis, bolting in without knocking. Mrs. Ellis was lying on the lounge, but she rose immediately to give him her place.

"I am cross and tired," he ejaculated, making himself comfortable at full length. Mrs. Ellis tossed her head with a scornful smile.

"I have no doubt of it. How is your bird now?"

"O, she's caged. She's a wild one, though."

"I should think so to look at her. You'll get caught yourself one of these days, old man. For goodness sake, don't meddle with that girl, or take her to Lawyer Grey. He's a bigger rascal than you are." Max sat up and rubbed his hands through his hair.

"Minerva, you're getting too good. What church do you belong to?"

"I am only getting wiser," she said, stirring the fire into a warm blaze.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Minerva," he said settling himself again, "you're off the track entirely. I

mean no harm to the girl. I am going to do well by her. I am going to switch off from Grey, and take her up to my wife. She'll be all right there, and no more trouble to me. I'm tired of her. She can help my wife run the Orphan Asylum."

"How about business, Max? Did you bring that money with you?"

"Oh, I forgot it. Never mind, I'll bring it around in a few days." She laughed sarcastically. His few days meant that it would require considerable nagging to get it. About its ultimate delivery, however, there was no question. She had the power to make it come.

"I'll wait a few months, Max, and then I'll call on your wife."

"All right, Minerva, let me rest a few minutes, I'm tired."

A few minutes before twelve, Mrs. Ellis went into Cis Beverly's room. The little trunk was ready, and the girl was bending over the sleeping infant in the bed. She looked up at Mrs. Ellis, seemingly quite contented with her plans.

"She hasn't enough clothes, Mrs. Ellis, but I will make more, and bring them as soon as I am able. These are just what I made of my own old clothes. They are not very nice." She rolled a little bundle together and laid it in a large basket Mrs. Ellis had provided. Presently Mrs. Ellis went out of the room, and she and Max were whispering together outside in the hall.

Cis lifted up the child, and kissed it tenderly. She

laid it down and looked at it sorrowfully, then, smiling softly, she took an old letter from her pocket, tore the letter into bits, and taking her pencil, wrote on the back of the envelope. She then slipped the envelope under the baby's dress, wrapped the child warmly, and arranged it comfortably in the basket on a pillow.

"Won't Mrs. Ellis smile when she sees that?" she whispered, as she carefully drew a veil over the infant's face.

Then in a few minutes it was all over. Mrs. Ellis came in, took the milk bottles, and a little alcohol stove in one hand, and the basket in the other. She leaned over and kissed the girl's white forehead with a kind, womanly manner, of which she was quite capable.

"Don't make a scene! Be brave now," she whispered, and glided off noiselessly to her rooms with her burdens.

A man came and took the trunk, and poor, confiding Cis Beverly went downstairs, still trusting the wretch who had led her to ruin; she was looking forward to a speedy righting of her wrongs, and the prospect of returning to Hardup, the bride of a wealthy man, whose bounty would rescue her grandparents from toil and poverty.

CHAPTER IV.

A JOKE TAKEN PRACTICALLY.

Mrs. Ellis placed the basket and contents before the fire in her room and sat down to think. She did not exactly relish the work before her, but she liked the money it would bring. Presently she rose, went into the hall, and called softly:

"Sam, Sam, get up, I want to see you." She came back and sat down in a comfortable chair, loosened her tight clothes, and unwound her heavy coil of hair.

Sam glided in, apparently not the least disturbed by being called at midnight.

"Sam, look at that young one." Sam looked at the basket and shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"Do you want to earn ten dollars, Sam?" Sam arched his brow slightly.

"What do?"

"Just carry that basket up town before daylight, and leave it where I tell you. Do you know where that Infant Shelter is on Howell Street, Sam?"

"Yes, I sabe."

"Well, leave it on the steps, and don't let any one see you."

"What for you give him away?"

"Give it away, Sam? I want to get rid of it, you

stupid. You be ready now, and take it up, and I will give you twenty dollars."

Sam came a step nearer.

"You not give him away. Him girl baby, you sell him."

"What do you mean, Sam?"

"I go get Chinaman buy him. Give you twenty, me twenty. You say all right." Mrs. Ellis was surprised.

"What, you eat him, Sam?"

"No, raise him in Chinatown. Make him slave. Sell him six hundred dollars." Mrs. Ellis was not an entirely wicked woman. She held up her hands in horror.

"Sam, you're a wicked boy! Go away. I'll have nothing to do with you." Sam hung his head and turned away.

"You do as I tell you, Sam," she said sharply. "You'll get your twenty dollars anyway. You can't fool me, either, I'll find it out if you do. Sam hesitated.

"Baby cry?"

"No Sam, I've put sleeping medicine in its milk, lots of it."

"All light, you keep him one day. I go to-morrow night." Sam had taken in the situation, and in true Chinese style, had decided to strike for better terms, or force her, by delay, to accept his proposition.

"O, no, Sam," she pleaded, "you go to-night."

"Too muchee cold. I go to-morrow night." And Sam slowly backed out of the room.

Mrs. Ellis was vexed, but she knew Sam thought too much of twenty dollars to fail to earn it; so she kept her composure and wisely concluded to make the best of her circumstances. But she was annoyed with the thought of keeping the child in her room all day. Some one might call and discover it, and she laid down so disturbed by her reflections, that she slept lightly and but little.

About three in the morning a brilliant idea occurred to her; and she arose and lit the gas, laughing softly to herself as she moved about the rooms.

She had been annoyed with Max because he had not brought her the money, and it occurred to her that she might punish him, and, at the same time, rid herself of the child during the following day.

She would petrify the country girl with astonishment, give Max a chance to do some tall lying and acting, and worry them both, till the next evening, when she could come in as a benevolent and kind-hearted observer, and take the child. There was no risk to take, and she knew that Max could think of a lie as quick as she could, and she would have a good joke on him.

So she took the child up, fed it with more of the prepared milk; arranged it neatly in the basket, and covered it with the shawl Cis had left with it; she then slipped quietly down stairs.

Meanwhile poor Hulda had passed a miserable night. When Royse had finally left her, she stood with a palpitating heart, agonizing and unwelcome convictions rushing into her mind.

"Oh mother, mother," she cried, bursting into tears, and sinking down on her knees by the lounge. "Why did I ever leave you? What made me dare to come away from my pretty home?" The girl had no conception of the real character of Max Royse, but she had never seen any man act as he had acted, and she knew that in some way she was disappointed, and had been deceived. She had noticed his wine-tainted breath, and that alone, to her simple mind, was sufficient to decide her. She wanted nothing to do with a man who drank wine. Her tears relieved her, and when she had stopped crying, she began to think to some purpose. How her heart ached, and how lonely and frightened she was in that great city alone! She thought of her mother sleeping quietly in the snug little cottage home, the old clock ticking away the tranquil hours. She took from her bosom her father's old-fashioned silver watch. It was eleven o'clock. She could hear steps occasionally passing her door. Home seemed to her, just then, the best and dearest place in the world. She resolved to leave the house early in the morning, inquire her way back to the boat, and return to Hardup. She was too nervous to undress herself, and she did not know how to put out the gas. So, with the light still burning, she lay down and tried to rest. A quick step sounding in the hall startled her, and she sprang into the middle of the room. But she lay down again, and fell into uneasy slumber. She dreamed that the boat was sinking, and that Cis Beverly was struggling in the water.

David Strong and her mother floated in a boat, and Cis was clasping her cold white fingers about the dreamer's neck. Then she awoke trembling with the name of her loved schoolmate on her lips. She began to think of Cis Beverly. She ought certainly to make some effort to see her. But it would be very hard to try to find her alone, without any knowledge of the city. How could she do it? Would she dare to try? She lay thinking it all over again and again. Dropping to sleep she was awakened by a tapping on her door. She sprang to the door and nervously held the key. A woman's voice spoke softly.

"Miss Hardy, are you awake? I have a package for you. I was directed to deliver it immediately."

Recognizing the voice as that of the landlady, Hulda unlocked the door and opened it slightly. Mrs. Ellis pushed herself in quickly, and placed the basket on the floor, while the girl looked at it and her with astonishment.

"What is it?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Ellis, "a messenger boy brought it, and wanted it delivered immediately. I said I would see to it, and he went away."

"There is no one to send me anything," persisted Hulda.

"Perhaps your friend, Mr. Royse, has sent you some new clothes," answered Mrs. Ellis, retreating to the door, "it was for you, any way." She quickly shut the door and was soon in her own bed shaking with laughter. Hulda first locked the door carefully,

then she turned and knelt by the basket, with burning cheeks. Would that man have the impudence to send her clothes?

She removed a newspaper that was neatly tucked over the basket. Then she droppped it and clasped her hands in dumb surprise. The shawl covering the basket was as familiar to her, as her own dress. It was an old shawl Cis Beverly used to wear to school; and Hulda had many times worn it about her own shoulders.

She carefully pulled it off, and the babe, still sleeping, threw up one little arm into her face. The recognition of the shawl was a revelation, and she knew at once that the child before her had some connection with her old schoolmate. Her curiosity was equal to her surprise, and she proceeded to examine the contents of the basket. The child's dress was of old, faded lawn, exactly like a dress Cis used to wear. The long white skirt, made of thin muslin, was trimmed with lace Hulda hersef had given to Cecelia Beverly. Full of curiosity to know more, she lifted the babe and laid it on the bed. A paper fluttered to the floor. Hulda snatched it. It was an envelope she herself had directed to Cis, and on it was written in her friend's own handwriing, "Take good care of my baby. I have named her Nonie. I will come and claim her just as soon as I can."

Hulda sat on the bed and read the writing over and over, thinking out her conclusion. Cis was in some kind of trouble, evidently, and was asking her for assistance. In all probability she had been de-

served by her husband. She again looked through the basket, and found the roll of clothes, and the nursing bottle, full of milk. Then she concluded that in some way Cis had learned of her arrival, and had taken this way of compelling her to serve and help her. Hulda looked about the room, and seeing the grate filled with kindling wood and coal, she started a fire and placed the bottle near it to keep warm. She stood a long time trying to think what to do. To her wearied and distressed mind, there was only one thing to do, to go to her own home. Cis, evidently, was hiding from her, and how could she find her, any way, with that baby on her hands? At six clock in the morning, Hulda opened her door and looked out into the hall. There was no one in sight. She ventured to the head of the stairs, and looked down into the street. She saw a boy coming up with a load of morning papers on his arm. She was glad. She was not afraid of a boy.

"Will you tell me the best way, please," she said, "to get to the Vallejo boat."

"Take any car passing the door," he answered, as he rushed by. Hulda fled back to her room much relieved. She wanted to get away without seeing the landlady. She did not want to have to tell anything about the mysterious child and her friend. She instinctively felt that there was some kind of a secret that must be preserved.

At sundown when the train stopped at Forest Grove, Hicks was waiting with his stage. When he saw Hulda getting off a car, burdened with a basket, he was at her side in a moment.

"Here you are, bag and baggage. I knew you'd be back to the dance," he said, teasingly, and trying to take the basket.

"No, no, don't touch it," she cried. "Here is the check for my valise. Get it quick, I want it," and while he was gone, she climbed into the stage. The child began to fret, and cry, and she had it in her arms, when he returned.

"Holy Jehosephat! What have you got there?" he cried.

"Hush! Hicks, don't you know a baby when you see it?"

"By Gum! Hain't yours, I hope."

"It's my cousin's. She died in the city," stammered the heroic, suffering girl, who had had all day to think what to say.

"And you brought it all the way alone? My! Ain't you a brick? But Lord! you look tired. You're dead worn out."

"Never mind, Hicks, take me home."

"Not by a long shot, till you have something to eat."

He slammed the door and drove directly to one of the hotels, and, paying no attention to her protestations, he rushed her into the parlor. She heard him telling the landlady that she was a brave girl from Hardup, who had brought her cousin's baby all the way from the city alone. The motherly landlady bustled in full of questions and kindness, and warmed, comforted and fed the baby, while Hulda went to the table and ate for the first time that day. She took

her last fifty cents from her purse to pay for her supper. But Hicks had already paid for it, and was warming robes to wrap her in, or the wind was blowing sharp and keen from the east. Hulda laughed when she heard him stowing five Chinamen on top of the stage.

Her heart began to leave her, as the stage rolled along through the gathering darkness towards her home. What would her mother say, when she had gone away to support herself, to come back with a burden. It was a strange thing to do.

She wondered then at all her nervousness and fear of the city, and began to think that she ought to have staid longer, to try to find out something about the baby. Then she shuddered to think of again being in the presence or power of the man who intended to call for her at ten o'clock.

Hicks helped her out of the stage, and his praising was stimulating, and his commendation gave her encouragement. He put her valise inside the gate; she took the basket, and stumbled through the darkness alone. It was cold, and there was no time for hesitation, so she opened the back door and called out in a loud, cheerful voice, "Mother, mother, I have come home. Ar'n't you glad?"

The mother was sitting in the warm little sitting-room sewing, and she only had time to lay aside her glasses and drop her work, when Hulda sank at her feet, and began to sob out her whole miserable story.

CHAPTER V.

HARDUP LIFE.

Far into the night, and again in the morning the two women talked, and Hulda passed from girlhood to womanhood in these long and serious consultations. Mrs. Hardy had considered the matter over and over, while Hulda slept the sleep of wearied youth, till late in the morning.

Hulda had recklessly told the stage driver that it was her cousin's child, and they were already publicly committed to keep the baby, until Cis came for it, or until they could get rid of it, in some plausible way. Besides, everyone in town already knew that Hulda had gone to the city, and it seemed to the mother that the appearance of the child was a good way to account for the trip, doing away with any necessity of explaining Hulda's foolish journey, and the grievous disappointment. She reproached herself bitterly for ever having allowed her daughter to take the trip; she was devoutly thankful to have her back safe and sound. And, the more she thought of it, the more she was glad that the baby had come in, to be used as a public excuse for that trip.

Thinking of the baby, as having been providentially supplied as an excuse, her heart warmed to the poor little waif. She thought it hardly probable that the

babe had a legal father, and she presented this truth to her pure daughter's mind, as gently as possible.

"Well, then, that is another reason we should claim it as our cousin's," said Hulda. "If we should tell the real story, it would break poor Grandma Beverly's heart. The old folks would die of grief."

"No, daughter, we ought never to tell the real story," said the mother, sadly and without reflection.

"Besides," continued Hulda, "here is the note, where she says she will come for it herself. She must expect to come out of her trouble all right, or she would never say that."

"If we are helping her to save herself, we ought certainly to keep the secret and the baby," said Mrs. Hardy.

"What will we say the baby's name is, mother? Nonie? Nonie what?" Mrs. Hardy considered thoughtfully.

"I did have a cousin die in the states. Her name was Graham."

"That will do," said Hulda. "Nonie Graham. And now you tend to Cousin Nonie Graham, while I wash the dishes."

When Mrs. Hardy undressed the baby, she found around its neck a little thin gold chain. Hulda took it eagerly.

"The very chain," she exclaimed, "that Cis wore to school for years!"

They took the note, the chain, the shawl and the clothes that people might recognize, and locked them away securely. Happily a snow-storm came up that

morning, followed by rain, so that the mother and daughter had time to make more clothes, and thoroughly rehearse their parts before the inquisitive neighbors had a chance to come in. And the little stranger in the rocking chair by the stove, seemed to thoroughly appreciate its good fortune, and made very little trouble.

Meanwhile Hulda's mind, hitherto rendered unnaturally dormant by her uneventful life, had been roused into activity by her strange adventure. She began to think with some vigor and purpose. She had learned the value of home and friends, and the foolishness of putting her trust in strangers. And what child of fortune or misfortune does not have to learn this sooner or later? She had learned the value of her mother, too, and after that long morning's talk, Hulda took the leading hand in the housework, and regulated everything to her own orderly habits. With her vigorous methods and quick motions, the work seemed to disappear by magic, and the little household fell into systematic quiet and order. Mrs. Hardy brought up an old plan she had had in her mind, of trying to persuade her daughter to become a teacher, and Hulda at once accepted the idea, so anxious was she to atone for her unfortunate trip to the city, to forget its memories, and redeem herself in her own eyes.

Before the storm cleared away Hulda's school books displaced her Latin books on the sitting-room table, and she began to study in earnest. She had made up her mind to attend the Teachers' Exami-

nation at Forest Grove in March, and she had no time to spare.

When the storm cleared a way, Hulda made her way through the mud to the postoffice, hoping to get some word from Cis, but there was nothing there, and the two women began to seriously accept the fear that something had gone wrong with the girl.

During all this, they had seen nothing of David, and Hulda was glad. They dreaded to see him, when they had such a secret on their minds, and they hoped he would be so sensible as to stay away awhile, when he heard they had a young baby in the house.

But one evening Hulda heard a great shuffling and scraping on the back porch and a good-natured laugh in the kitchen, and she knew David was there speaking with her mother. She moved the rocking chair, with its little sleeping burden, into the corner, and her face was bent over her slate when he came in. But she rose and gave him her hand with a simple welcome.

"Well, how's the family, especially the new part of it?" he said, getting down into a chair and trying to pack his feet away into a small space.

"Oh, all right," said Hulda, gravely looking at her mother to gain courage.

"What's the matter here? you look kinder sober," he continued in his usual jocular manner.

"We can't be funny all the time, as you are," said the mother pleasantly.

"By the way, Hulda," he said, "you're a funny girl to fly off to the city alone without letting me know."



“How is the family, especially the new part of it?”

David of Juniper Gulch.

"No more than you did, Dave," she retorted quickly, but he pretended not to hear.

"Didn't see any one I know down there, I suppose," he said, after some moments, as he carefully polished his knife blade on the sole of his boot. Hulda's head bent lower over her slate, and Mrs. Hardy answered for her.

"How could she see anyone? She had no time."

"Then you didn't know she'd been sick!" As if they must know of whom he was thinking.

"Well, I was over to see the old folks yesterday. They've had a letter from Cis. She says she's been sick, but after awhile, she's coming home on a visit. It's the same old story, though. I don't believe she will." Both the women were silent, with bent heads, and when David had finished polishing his knife, and put it away, he sat upright with his hands in his pockets, and began to tell them of the various little matters of gossip about town.

"You ought to see the new teacher, Hulda. He's a regular old maid. He'd just suit you. He's down there at the hotel fussing like an old hen because it's noisy at night, and noisy in the morning, and I don't know what all. Better take him in here, Hulda."

Hulda looked up with an eager expression at her mother. They had not been having the teacher for some years.

"Yes, mother, do. I'll do the cooking," said the girl, thinking of the profit. David laughed heartily and seemed to regard it as a good joke.

"Yes, David, she really can cook very well," said

Mrs. Hardy. "And if Hulda insists upon studying for a teacher, I will take him; he might offer to give her some help." David rose to go.

"All right, I'll send him up in the morning. Hold, a minute, providing, Hulda, you'll promise to go to the social Tuesday night with me. I'll allow no cranky school-teacher to get ahead of me."

"You must go," said the mother gently.

"O, dear, if I have to! How I do hate socials!" complained Hulda, following David to the front door.

"All right, I'll be around to help you through the misery. Good-night, then." And David strode away, whistling cheerily.

The next day after school hours the teacher came, and was immediately taken to the front, up-stairs chamber, that Hulda had spent the day cleaning and arranging. The furniture was mostly composed of dry goods boxes, curtained in spotless white, and adorned with crimson ribbons; but there was a good, wide table, covered with white, for a desk, a comfortable rocker, a clean, fresh rag-carpet, prints on the walls, and blooming plants by the window; and Joseph Cornman, washing his chalky hands in the white bowl, thought it was delightfully charming and homelike. He was grateful to escape from his dark, untidy room at the stage station, and he went down to the savory dinner, odorous from below, with his most complacent smile.

Mr. Cornman was a large, thin man; he wore a coat too large, and too thin for that season of the year. His cold, blue eyes were well set in his head,

and his smile was the well trained expression of naturally awkward features. But his look was keenly intelligent, and his movements were graceful and methodical.

Having practiced the profession of teaching for twenty years, he had found policy and economy to be his most useful principles and he practiced them both faithfully. The former, so well that he was generally considered to be a successful teacher, the latter, so well, that he had saved enough to have a very creditable bank account. He could spell anything in the English language, and professed to a modest knowledge of Latin and Greek. He allowed no one to challenge his pronunciation, and the enthusiastic preacher, who in the heat of fervor, departed slightly from the standard pronunciation, found an immediate record in the teacher's never absent note-book. He had not been long at the Hardy cottage when Hulda called him the pronunciation old maid, and hung in his room a blue silk pin cushion full of assorted pins. At the first meal at the house, he had set the girl's face in a glow by correcting her pronunciation several times. She soon began to receive his correction complacently, and then to invite his criticisms. Mr. Cornman, though not giving to bestowing his time gratuitously, developed a critical interest in the girl's progress, and when David appeared Tuesday night to take Hulda to the social, the teacher was bending over Hulda's shoulder directing her in her last pages in arithmetic.

Hulda, knowing that her hair was tidy, put on her

hat and shawl without leaving the room, and she and David were soon picking their way through the mud, in the clear moonlight of the cold winter evening.

"Why didn't you bring your old Crusty with you?" said David, when they came to the door of the house, which was open to the members of the church and the people of the town, for an entrance fee of ten cents, in accordance with the custom of the days of Dime Socials.

"Oh," cried Hulda, "I should have asked him. I forgot it. Hadn't we better go back and get him?"

"Not much, if I know myself," said David, brusquely, pushing the girl before him into the house. She removed her wrap in the narrow front hall, then David again thrust her forward into the next room, which was lined with people sitting against the walls.

There was an outburst of greeting and laughter, as the glowing girl made her appearance, followed by the blustering, blundering David, whom everybody liked. He was claimed at once by several different friends, but carried away finally by some laughing young girls to the kitchen, where a handkerchief was bound around his eyes, and he was at once made the central figure in a boisterous game of "Blind-man's-buff."

Hulda, ill at ease, sank into a corner; the minister's wife came and spoke to her, inquired about her mother and the cousin's baby, then seeing a new arrival, hurried away on her mission of giving a smile and a word of welcome to every one. Hulda heard

the laughter in the kitchen and was about to get herself out there, in some unobserved moment, when Mrs. Merry, the committee on introduction for the evening, entered the room, followed by Hulda's boarder.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is Mr. Cornman, the new teacher," she said majestically, then relapsing from her dignity, she motioned to Hulda.

"Here," she said, "you come show him around." She ran back into the hall for a new subject, and Hulda, as she saw no escape, stood up awkwardly and introduced him to a few people close at hand, then shrank back into her corner. He immediately sat down beside her with the crisp remark:

"I thought I would come, Miss Hardy, even though you omitted to invite me."

"Oh," she said, overcome with confusion, "I didn't think of it. I didn't know it was my place."

"Oh, well," he returned, crossing his awkward length of limb and smiling shrewdly, "I will overlook it this time. You had a beau!"

He apparently enjoyed the expression of wild astonishment on her face. She did not consider David her beau, and plainly said so.

"But that only indicates a more complicated state of affairs," insinuated the teacher, looking searchingly at her face, while the waves of color rolled over it. But David had peeped into the room, and seeing her distress, crossed over to them.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, seizing the teacher's hand and shaking it long and vigorously. "How do you

do? I'm glad to see you here. Why didn't you come with us?"

It was Mr. Cornman's turn to be discomfitted. He saw the point with a dry smile, and rose to move his seat. But David stopped him and tumbled into Hulda's lap a suit of cards of the then popular parlor game of Authors.

"Let's have a game. Keep your seat, do," persisted David Strong, enjoying the chance of keeping the teacher in a corner. He moved up some chairs and quickly brought up a sprightly old maid and a small boy. Hulda assorted the cards and the game began, Hulda playing wretchedly. She was just beginning to take impressions about others, and the teacher annoyed and confused her. She knew nothing about character study. She only knew some people were kind to her, others were not. She was beginning to assign the teacher to his place in the scale as she played. Between her thoughts, and David's laughable remarks, she lost all her points, and the cards accumulated in the hands of the teacher, and the delighted, little old maid. The teacher grew more genial, and made very correct little jokes, and David whispered to the old maid that he thought the new teacher was smitten with her; she grew more sprightly. Suddenly the small boy threw down his cards, and David, muttering something about two being better company than four, took Hulda's arm and led her out to the kitchen, declaring that if she couldn't play she should work. The sisters of the church, who were cutting cake and pouring tea, de-

clared that these were the very waiters they wanted, and that no one else would do as well.

David burdened himself with a large tray of cups, and limping, and pretending to suffer greatly, called to Hulda to follow with the cake. Hulda was bright enough to surmise, that the women did not really care for her help, she being too slow and sedate, but that they had asked her simply to please David, because they wanted his invaluable services, he being a great success at selling tea, at five cents a cup. But Hulda wanted to please David herself, so she accepted the task, wondering if she could not disappoint the good sisters, and do better than they supposed she could. She succeeded so well, that when she returned to have her plates filled, Mrs. Merry remarked to a friend: "How that Hulda Hardy is coming out. I never saw her act like a young lady before. I wonder if she isn't in love with David."

Mr. Cornman treated himself and the old maid to tea and cake, and remarked, smiling at the young couple before him, "I suppose this is typical of future dispensation of refreshments from your domicile."

Hulda colored and looked miserable, but David put on a vacant look, and said, turning away, "Too much dictionary in that for me! Can't sense it, sir."

Every one in the corner laughed aloud, appreciating his humor, more than the feeble wit of the teacher.

"See here," said David to Hulda, as they went back to the kitchen, "you have to learn to be saucy, if you want to get along in this world. Don't let

folks laugh at you. Send 'em back as good as they give."

"But, Dave," she said, "it seems impolite. I wish people would talk the way they do in books. Then I could get along."

"O, bother the books, child, quit reading, and learn to act like other folks do. You'll be set down for a fool, if you don't."

Later he found her in a corner again. "Now you must come out of this," he said. "This won't do." She looked at him imploringly, but he dragged her out, and took her a merry journey around the room, introducing her gravely to people she had known all her life, and making everything so irresistibly funny, that she was forced herself into several witty remarks, which were received with applause that gratified David at least.

"Dave, what makes you so happy to-night," she asked later when they were picking their way home through the muddy, irregular street walks. He stopped, and took her arm, and she looked up to see that his face was sober and pale in the moonlight.

"Hulda," he said, "what account would I be if I didn't make people laugh? I'd be a regular bore. I haven't got learning, and I have to make up for it the best way I can."

"But Dave," she replied eagerly, "why don't you study and improve yourself?"

"Not and rustle around, as I have to do, to get a home and a little start," he returned.

A quick pain crossed the girl's heart. He was still

waiting and working for Cis, and she dare not tell him. What could she tell, if she dared?

"I suppose I always act as I feel," she said finally.

"You can't do that, if you want to get on in the world. Why don't you rustle around and flirt with the teacher? People will talk, but they will think you are that much smarter." Hulda laughed merrily.

"I can do better with him than flirting, Dave, I am getting lots of free instruction out of him."

"Good-night, Hulda," said David, opening the gate.

"Well, good-night, Dave."

His merry whistle did not ring back through the clear air that night as usual.

Hulda found the teacher's assistance to be of great value. He only made suggestions here and there, but they were wisdom condensed. The science of arithmetic opened up magically, and her clouds in grammar were cleared away. He would sit by the sitting-room stove on cold, stormy evenings, apparently to keep his feet warm, but in reality to lead her over a great deal of ground in American History without much reading.

On clear days she would go to the schoolhouse, and watch his manner of teaching and explaining. Truths and theorems which she had been reciting, parrot-like, developed vitality and meaning. The teacher then gave her a class of children to instruct occasionally, to the secret delight of the little tow-heads, who would cluster around her on the street, calling her the new school-marm; and Mr. Cornman frequently alluded to her as his "able assistant."

Meanwhile Hulda heard nothing from Cis Beverly, except that she sometimes learned from the grandparents, that their dear child was coming home.

Nonie thrived, and Mrs. Hardy grew placidly attached to her; and all their discussions about her would end only in the conclusion that they could do nothing but wait.

Once Mrs. Hardy went over to the Beverly farm, resolved to tell the old people about it, and give them the child, but she found Mrs. Beverly in her bed, and the old man so feeble, that she dare not disquiet them with such news. She only went to work to make them more comfortable. She swept the house, brewed some home-made medicine, baked a cake, and left them better in every way for her visit. Hulda met her at the front gate, for tea was ready, and Nonie fretting.

"Never mind," she said, when she heard her mother's story, "its only a burden to us, not a trouble, and we will carry the burden and wait.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEACHERS' EXAMINATION.

The March days were often cold and windy, in those upper foot hills, and on this third of March, although the sun shone with glaring brightness, lighting up the paths of snow in the cañons and under the pines, yet the air was keen and piercing.

The school-girl hurried down the paths of the hill with the miscellaneous wraps of the household bundled around her, the boy buttoned his roundabout under his chin and ran. A pale, thin woman shut her door with a bang, and hurried to her window to see if the stage might be passing. Hulda, having been up several hours, was warm and rosy and full of spirits.

Mr. Cornman looked up from his coffee as she was tying on her hat, and said, "Don't be too sanguine, Miss Hardy, you might be frightened out of everything you know."

"Never fear," she cried, "I will think of something to say."

The teacher, not having much sympathy with the elasticity of youth, with a sarcastic smile, turned to his breakfast. Hulda kissed her mother and sprang down the steps, and out of the gate with a swiftness

of motion that caused Hicks to pull up his horses suddenly. Hulda handed up her reticule, climbed up onto the wheel, took the offered hand, landed onto the seat by the driver, and seated herself, while the uneasy horses started the stage.

Hicks pushed the express box under her feet, and threw a blanket over her lap, while Hulda drew her wraps closer, as the wind came fairly into her face. Oh, the joy of the box-seat of a stage-coach behind four horses! Hulda was immediately transported from the dull realm of history and school-books to the bright glad world of her childhood and her happier hours. That long, low grove of young pines and bushes, that lay along the road, had been her childhood playground. Under its mysterious shadows lay all the ghosts, and fairies and brownies of her vivid imagination. How often had she sped by at dusk on winged feet! What uncanny creatures were condemned to live under the brush-wood by the invention of the active brained children of Hardup! There, crossing the gulch was her old rock-walled playhouse, abandoned now to younger inhabitants. There was the same mossy boulder, upon which she had given many a tea party, with slate rock for plates, pine burrs for pitchers, and acorn shells for cups. There were the immovable, water-washed lounges and chairs, soft as divans to the merry inhabitants of that mossy house. There were her favorite pines, tall and scraggy, but dropping treasures of nuts every year. There was the hillside flume projecting over the cañon, across which Hulda had taken many a perilous

climb impelled on, by the "My's!" and "Oh My's!" of admiring companions. There were the paths leading up into the hills, where she went for white lilies and rarer tiger lilies. There was the spring where the lady-slippers bloomed and waited for the fairies to use them. Listening to the clattering and clicking of the horses' feet on the hard road, the girl's mind was busy with the sweet memories of her happy childhood.

"By hooky! you must be dead gone on him!" finally ejaculated Hicks, tired of her silence. "You haven't spoke since we started."

Hulda looked around with wide eyes.

"Gone how? What do you mean, Hicks?" The driver laughed, cracking his long whip.

"Maybe you don't understand, young folks never do." She colored now. What if he were alluding to something he might have found out about her city trip!

"Blushing, be ye? Well, good luck! But I'm thinking ye mount have found someone a little younger." This with another sly look.

Hulda was mystified. Her mind being filled with formulas and rules, and the purest thoughts of youth, commonplace gossip was profoundly obscure. Finally, not wishing particularly to divine his meaning, she said:

"Be sure and call for me Saturday night at the Forest Hotel. I am going to the Teachers' Examination, you know." A new light appeared on the jolly driver's face.

"Yes, yes, I reckoned so. Ye can work together, ye know, and git along first rate." Then the truth dawned upon her, and she laughed outright.

"Mr. Cornman! Why Hicks, you're crazy. Don't you know me better than that?" Then Hicks was satisfied, and threw off his brake, and went flying down the grade with a relieved mind.

But Hulda was disturbed. The idea of her name being associated with any one's in that way was distasteful to her. The thought of love or marriage for herself had never entered her mind. But the generality of common people of the west are vigilant that few girls live long in this state of purity. Aprons with sleeves are hardly discarded before the average girl is continually reminded by all classes and ages that she has, or ought to have, a beau.

Hulda brushed her hair in her little six by seven room at the hotel, and then went up to a big bleak schoolhouse on a windy hill where she found seven or eight applicants for teacher's certificates gathered around a hot stove in a large room. She thought the men all reminded her of Mr. Cornman, and the women were young, plainly dressed, and pale and anxious-looking.

The County Superintendent, a small, lame man with a kindly face, sat at the desk with several teachers, constituting the County Board of Examination, and they were unpacking large files of printed questions furnished by the State Board.

Hulda went up with her letter of introduction kindly furnished by Mr. Joseph Cornman. The Super-

intendent read it, with a glance at the girl, and said, "Very well, Miss Hardy. Take your seat." One of the men stood up and read the rules of the examination, another arranged the applicants in the seats, one passed around the paper and pens, and the arduous written examination began. The first paper was on history, and Hulda was delighted to note that she knew all the answers. She wrote rapidly, finished her paper before any one else, and had time to look around at her laboring companions. A young man had come in shortly before, and was seated at the desk in front of her. She noticed a shining white collar, black hair and a well poised head. At that moment some one opened a door; a draught of air carried Hulda's last written sheet over onto the young man's desk. He picked it up quickly, and turning, returned it to her. His face was clean shaven and characterized by a firm, manly, keenly intelligent expression. He was young, not many years older than she, and Hulda, feeling a sense of companionship, noticed him in the pauses of her work. He worked even more rapidly than she, however, and had even more time to look about.

As soon as a recess was announced, he arose and went to the desk, shaking hands with all the members of the board, as if he knew them. Soon after she saw him with her letter of introduction in his hand, and he immediately came down and spoke to her, calling her by name. His manner was brotherly and pleasant.

"You are from Hardup, I see. We don't often

have applicants from there. My name is Edward La Grange; I am teaching at Bird's Flat. How are you getting along?"

Then they seemed quite well acquainted already. He told her that he had a county certificate, but was trying for a State certificate.

"I have a little request to make of you," said Hulda smiling.

"Certainly, what is it?"

"Would you move yourself one seat forward? I can see across, and can read your papers as you pile them up." He laughed.

"Well, I have no objection. This is your first, and I am willing that you should profit by being behind me. The Board seated us." She opened her eyes so wide that he laughed again.

"But I can't be dishonest," she said, "and I hate temptation."

"I would not call that being dishonest," he replied. But he moved his papers, and the order bell rang. She wondered if he were annoyed, but he seemed to see the humorous side of it, and after he had written a sheet he carefully covered it with a large white handkerchief, from which a faint perfume came across the desk. This process he repeated with each fresh sheet, glancing with a smile to see if she observed. When the noon recess was announced, he turned immediately to her.

"Are you stopping at the Forest Hotel?" he asked. "Wait a moment, and I will walk with you." Here he was taking unquestioned possession of her, and

Hulda felt at ease with him, a new sensation for her with a stranger, and a man.

Then, in a moment, he had introduced her to a Miss Gage and a Mr. Smith, and a Miss Cantwell and a Miss Fox, and all together, they walked out into the wind. Hulda drew a long, relieved breath. It was so sweet to get out into the air, and so pleasant to be with young people who seemed to be some like herself. The six young people walked down the hill in couples.

"And so you were afraid my papers might be wrong," said La Grange, banteringly, as the wind struggled with Hulda's veil, finally tearing it from her bright flushing face.

"Why, you don't understand me at all," she said.

"Oh, yes, I do, really, Miss Hardy. But if you would not be dishonest, why did you want temptation removed."

"Oh, but I fear temptation," she said. "I needed all my thoughts."

"Oh, I see," he replied, reflectively. "Women are strong because they know they are weak. While I don't flee temptation, and fall into wrong because I don't run from it. Oh, well, that's like us men."

The girl looked at him curiously.

"I don't believe you have ever fallen into serious wrong, Mr. La Grange." He laughed merrily.

"Well, I hope I merit your good opinion." He took her to the door of the hotel. She ran up to her room.

"I am a goose," she thought, tearing down her

hair, "I always take things too serious, as Dave says. Probably he is making fun of me."

In the afternoon she saw that La Grange, who had no difficulty with his papers, and had plenty of spare time, had been asked to assist the Board with the examination of the papers; so that he had no time at all to give her further attention.

At noon on the last day, as she was walking up the hill with her usual rapid pace, he called and overtook her; she was tired and lonely. She had kept her room and studied most of the time after hours.

"I only wished I knew how my papers were coming out," she said to him as they walked along. "I suppose you have no right to tell me."

"I am not supposed to know which your papers are. That would not be considered fair," he returned, looking at her.

"Oh, to be sure," apologized the girl, "but as you are so near my desk I supposed you couldn't help but know."

"What if my conscience wouldn't allow me to look," laughed La Grange.

"I beg your pardon." She laughed too, and they were on very friendly and jolly terms.

But that was not the truth; he knew all her papers. The fact was he had been interesting himself unduly in the progress of her work; a circumstance that gave rise, some months later, to serious complications. The last afternoon was long and the papers were difficult, and La Grange watched her with anxiety as each new paper of questions was handed her. The

Superintendent rose and said in a weary tone that as fast as the candidates finished their papers they were excused to go, and that those who were entitled to certificates would receive them by mail.

Hulda worked carefully and slowly and the afternoon changed into dusk, and the dusk to dark, and four ladies and three gentlemen were still writing. Hulda finished first; she folded her last paper with a sigh of relief, and went out quickly, glad as a freed bird. She put her hat and cloak on by the feeble light of a dirty lamp, and opened the front door to a grateful current of fresh air. La Grange quietly stepped up and filled the opening.

"So you are through," he said. "How happy you and I ought to be. Don't you pity those poor prisoners inside? I am nearly frozen waiting." It came into her head, that she would be glad to have him take her to the hotel, but she said:

"Why do you wait then?" He took hold of her arm.

"Sit down on the step here, and I will tell you. See, the moon is just rising! You see, Miss Hardy, there are just eight of us left, and we thought we would double up and go to the dance. It was arranged for me to take you; or rather, Miss Hardy, in the words of society, may I have the pleasure of your company?"

She was silent, and he whistled a little tune softly and rubbed his cold hands, while he waited. He knew enough about Hardup society to know that she did not belong to the dancing circles. Then she had

not the graces or motions of a girl who danced much. She had such a pure, innocent face and dressed so plainly, perhaps she had never had opportunities to go to dances. But this was not so, for David would have taken her many times, or brought her partners; but Mrs. Hardy, a strict Methodist, had set her face firmly against it. She thought it very sinful to dance and she continually told her daughter so. Hulda had seen the lights and heard the music many times at the town hall of Hardup, but she had never felt any desire to oppose her mother's opinions.

But this was all new and different. La Grange had been kind to her; she wanted to be with him, and the other young people. She was struggling with what she considered her first temptation. He stopped whistling and waited.

"I am sorry you asked me," she said slowly, "for I don't see how I can go."

"Don't see. Well, you don't have to see," he replied, jocularly. "You just step out in the dark and depend on me. Don't disappoint us now."

"I should be disappointed in myself if I went." She spoke so seriously and firmly that he tried to see her face, which was in the shadow.

"Is it a matter of that conscience again?"

"Yes," she said sadly, "mother has never allowed me to go to dances."

"Well," he said, rising, "just wait a moment till I see how they are getting along, then I will take you down to your hotel, and see that you get some supper. They're slow as time," he said, returning, "slow as

time. Smith is pulling his hair, and Miss Gage is chewing her pencil. Come, now, let us reason together." He was so cheerful and patient! But Hulda found that he was insistent. He tried all sorts of arguments and persuasions to induce her to go to the dance. "How do you know it is wrong to dance?" he urged, "when you have never danced? How do you know dances are not properly conducted when you never go?" She finally took refuge in the statement that her mother would be displeased.

"That is an excuse," he said, "and not a reason; but I will accept it. Come, let us make a fight for our supper."

The table-girl was in white with red roses in her hair, and Hulda did not see the bribe he slipped into her hand, to induce her to spread them a late lunch in the corner of the dining-room. Here they fell into a strain of merry talk, so that he quite forgot that he had promised to go to the dance, and suddenly remembering, left her abruptly at the table. When she was slowly ascending the stairs, he called to her from below.

"They've gone and left me, and I am excused from following," he said. "Wouldn't you like to come and walk on the street?" She turned with a quick smile and blush of pleasure.

"Will you wait a moment?" She ran to her room, dashed her face with cold water, and came down with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes. The town had already begun the revelry. The streets were full of carriages and wagons; a hilarious party had taken

possession of the hotel parlor, and the halls were crowded. Children ran freely up and down the streets, and couples walked back and forth waiting for the dance to begin.

A large, rough, unpainted building used as a public hall and ball-room was heavily decorated with evergreens, and lighted with numerous lamps of all descriptions. Doors and windows were wide open, and as soon as the dancing began, La Grange led his partner by, in hopes that she might relent and wish to enter. He stopped her by the door, and she stood erect watching the flying forms, charmed with the music, the motion and the gayety, while La Grange was watching her with amusement and admiration. The light shone full upon her shining eyes, and there was an unconscious smile upon her face. He gently drew her arm.

"Come, let us go in a moment. Let me teach you to waltz." Then all the beauty of her face paled, and she moved back into the shadow.

"O, no, do not ask me. There will be no time in my life for dancing any way." He laughed heartily at her seriousness, and they moved on; he was newly pleased with her that she had not yielded.

"I would like to tell you, Miss Hardy," he said, "how much I have done and how much I have danced. I am not much older than you. Pardon me, I am only twenty, or thereabouts. It is not a question of age, however; but you have a right to your opinion."

"Tell me what you have done."

"Well, if it will not be too tedious, I will. Sup-

pose I give you a sketch of my life. In the first place—"she looked up at him to see his head held as usual very high and proud—"I don't know where I was born or how old I am, or what my name is." He looked down into her wide open eyes. "My foster father came to this country twenty years ago. At Panama a large number of steerage passengers were sick with fever, my own parents being among them. When the steamer was to start, they found my father dead and my mother dying. They would have left me, but a man among the steerage passengers took me in his arms, and said he was my uncle. He had taken a fancy to me.

"Arriving at San Francisco he left for the mines, and I don't think he left his name with the Steamer Co., or took any pains to find my people, if I had any. He claimed not to know my name, but he loved me, and was kind to me; and I have only reasoned it out lately that he really stole me. He went from place to place like all miners, and after a while he married a sturdy western girl, and I had a mother. Six years ago my good father died, and I have had to be the father of seven children that he left. He left us with a home and that was all. I have worked by the day in the mines, chopped wood, fiddled at dances, carried mail on snow shoes, and now I have taught for three years. But I have made my story too long. The moral is that I always go to a dance, if there are to be any school trustees or their daughters present. I don't mind telling you I hope sometime to get the Forest Grove school."

"But when, and where, did you get your education?" interrupted Hulda.

"I haven't any," laughed La Grange. "I make people think I have. I studied nights, went to school whenever I could, and the rest I learned at dances, I guess," looking down at her speaking face. "I have had to study Latin nights, and study how to be popular daytimes."

"And you have learned that part well," said Huldla warmly.

"I go where the people go," he continued. "I love the people and I hope that some time the people will love me, enough to elect me to office anyway. I intend to be a politician. I am studying law to that end. How I would love to get a bit of power in my hands."

"That is what I never expect to have," she said simply.

"O, yes, you can marry a voter and help me."

"And that I will never do," she cried earnestly.

"Why?" His tone was peremptory.

"I can't understand the men. I am afraid of them."

"I shall take you right in," he laughed, "I might hurt you."

"O, no."

"Well, you can understand this much about me. I will help you every way I can to get a school. You are so good, you never could get one alone."

"If I get a certificate," she said. They crossed over to the hotel."

"Now, good-night," he said. She gave him her hand."

"I suppose you will go to the dance."

"Yes, for a while," he still held her warm hand.

"And you go home—?"

"Before to-morrow night if I get a chance."

"Well, good-night."

She withdrew her hand and went slowly up the stairs from the hallway. She turned at the landing. He was looking up at her, his hat in his hand. She blushed and said again:

"Good-bye."

"Good-night and pleasant dreams," he said and went out.

Hulda came down stairs the next morning at the early dawn, and ate breakfast with the laborers. Before she was through, she heard Hicks in the hall inquiring for her. She ran out. He told her he had the job of taking the musicians to Bird's Flat for another ball that night, and he would go around through Hardup for her if she wished.

"Hicks, you never forget me," she said.

"Oh, git out. Them boys'll be as dry as chips, and I have to go to Hardup any way. Git your things, girl."

He shut the band boys inside and put her on the seat, and they were soon clattering out of town.

CHAPTER VII.

A GREAT BEREAVEMENT.

Mrs. Ellis slept late on the morning of the day that she had carried the basket down to the country girl's room at the early hour of 'three o'clock. She then thought that she would not go down until she heard some demonstration from some one; but her curiosity overcame her patience, and about ten o'clock she went down to the room she had given the stranger. Hearing no sound, she opened the door and saw at a glance that the room was vacated. She closed the door with a bang, and went about the halls giving orders to Sam in a higher tone than usual, and with much clatter of her keys. She was never surprised at anything, but she was annoyed because Max had returned her trick with an equally smart one. He had evidently been there and spirited the whole thing out from under her nose in broad daylight. He had manifestly taken the girl into his confidence and found a cheaper way of carrying out his deviltry than employing her to do it. She shook her curls, and resolved to think no more about it. At eleven o'clock Royse found Sam making the bed. He stood in the middle of the room unfastening his overcoat.

"Sam, where's the lady?" Sam shrugged his shoulders and patted the pillows, his face like a mask.

"I no know."

"Yes, you do, you devil; where is she?" Sam grinned.

"She's gone, all gone." He took up his pails and started out.

"Come back, you grinning idiot. Where's the girl?"

"I no know. She all gone; everything gone. Gas burn all night. No gettee dollar."

"Damn the dollar!" said Max vigorously; and he strode down the stairs.

He had been left; that was all; the country girl had seen through him and gone home. But he had plenty on his mind to attend to, and he gave the matter no further thought.

It was some months before he came again to this down town lodging house. The halls had been lighted for the evening. The floors were bright with new rugs, and the wood work shone with new varnish. Max Royse, Land Agent, went slowly up to the upper rooms. He was much more dignified than formerly. He had improved in health, weight, appearance, and general self-respect. He had prospered too; a successful speculation having made him many thousand richer. He was president of a political club, had something to do with a paper, and he had altogether lifted himself above his former level. His clothes were becoming, and his overcoat was a marvel of fineness and finish. His tall hat had never before been so glossy and spotless.

He came to the private rooms of Mrs. Ellis; went

in without knocking, shut the door, and sat down. A clear silvery voice rang through the hall.

"Sam, who was that went in my room?"

Soft, celestial slippers retreated down a by-hall, and very soon the owner of the voice swept into the room with her usual grace and dignity. Her dress was perfect. It was a trailing silk tastefully trimmed in jet.

"Oh," she exclaimed, bowing but not giving him her hand, "I was not expecting so grand a caller. Allow me to take your hat. Take this new easy chair."

"Thank you," he returned coolly. "I think I will, and seeing you're home I will light my cigar." She brought him a match, and after lighting his cigar leisurely, he took from an inner pocket two theater tickets, and handed them to her.

"Go?" he asked.

She looked at them critically, laid them down, and left the room. When she returned he said through the smoke:

"Sam cook?"

"Of course."

"I never have anything to eat except when I come here," he said.

He sat calmly looking into the bright grate fire waiting for her to entertain him. She drew up a wide, cushioned chair, sat down and leaned back in easy elegance.

"Well," she said after a pause, "what are you passing yourself off for now? Are you the respectable and bereaved widower?"

He looked up and nodded slightly.

"But that was three months ago by the papers, Max, I went to the church myself. I don't often go to funerals in high society. Don't look so solemn, you frighten me." He threw his cigar into the fire, flung up his arms and began to look more like himself.

"Minerva, she was a terrible loss. I don't care if I am a devil, it's hard to get along without her. She was good and smart, and respected by every one. Why she could almost run an Orphan Asylum all alone, she had so much influence. She was so highly respected and religious that I could be off on a sort of vacation all the time."

"Which you were."

"Well, I was always home Sundays, and she never knew what a wretch of a husband she had. Poor girl! She left the children in my care, and made me promise to take them to church every Sunday."

Mrs. Ellis laughed sarcastically.

"And you do?"

"Astonishing as it is, I do. Don't make fun of me. I thought a good deal of Mrs. Royse."

She yawned audibly with a lace handkerchief over her mouth.

"What became of that country girl?" she asked, after a pause.

"Which one?"

"O, that one that came here that night." Max laughed heartily.

"O, she made up her mind I was a fool, and ran away."

"Didn't you take her away?"

"No, 'pon my word and honor, I never saw her again."

She believed him and ventured to make one more step in the dark.

"Max, where is that two hundred dollars you promised me?"

To her astonishment he took out a fat purse and handed her the money. They were both silent a while.

"And little Cis Beverly. What became of her at last?"

"O, she got on all right, I got her a nice room, and went up the next day and told her the baby died of croup. She cried a little, but she soon lost faith in me after that. She found out who I was. She left the place and I lost her. I've been trying to hunt her up; she was a nice little thing, and if her record's all right, I'd as lief marry her as not."

Mrs. Ellis threw up her hands.

"O, you make me nervous. Let her alone. She had a home in the mountains, and I suppose she's gone there. She's too good for you, any way."

Here Mrs. Ellis rose and opened the door, and Sam appeared with a tray of dishes. After they had lunched, she put on a stylish gray velvet opera bonnet, a rich opera cloak with pink silk lining, and, promptly at eight, these two fine looking and elegantly dressed people entered a private box at the Baldwin Theater.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID'S PLOTTING.

The morning of Hulda's return from the examination at Forest Grove, she sat in the little kitchen, where her mother was washing dishes, giving her an animated account of every incident of her trip. A minute description of La Grange, however, was lost in the general description of all.

"And mother," she cried, "some of the questions were so hard I saw the members of the Board looking them up. They didn't know them."

"And perhaps you will find that you didn't know them, either," said the mother reprovingly.

"Even so," said a grave voice behind her. She looked back startled. The Hardup teacher was smiling over her head in his peculiar, sarcastic manner. He had come in the back door, and held in his hand a spray of the first cherry blossoms. He dropped it into the girl's lap. She snatched it up with an exclamation. Ah, the shy, beautiful things, to come out while she was gone! She held the blossoms to her pink cheek with one hand, and gave the other to the teacher, saying simply:

"Good morning, Mr. Cornman."

"I see you haven't changed any, since you went

away," he said, his face relaxing into an admiring expression, as he looked down upon her.

"I am just as egotistical," she answered, dropping her eyes. He went out as quietly as he came in. How he annoyed her with his implied criticism! She was reminded by his appearance, that her success, if she had succeeded, was due to his help.

"He thinks I am such a goose!" she exclaimed to her mother.

"He thinks enough of you to bring you flowers," said the mother with an apparent insinuation in her emphasis.

"Oh, mother!" Then she thought of what the stage driver had said. "I hate him."

"Hush, hush, child, you owe him a great deal."

Hulda snatched a red shawl and hood that hung behind the door, and ran out into the orchard. How sweet it was, to get with one bound, away from such suggestions into the warm sunshine, and the brightness and the beauty of the orchard! She wanted a little run after her three days confinement. Snatching a hammer she first nailed several loose pickets back into place, then went out by her favorite orchard path, to a grove of young pines on the slope beyond. The cold, brushy branches of the low, thick pines whipped her form, as she pushed her way through, and the grasses dampened her feet. But she loved to crush the grass and smell the strong odor of the pines. She had missed this walk for a long time; she had been so busy with her studies. She was eager to see if there were some wild flowers

on the sunny hill beyond the pines. She had always greeted the first blossoms in the spring. She had a fancy that they would know, if she were not there. To seek out the first blossoms and press them to her lips was to her a keen delight, the more because it was of the nature of stolen pleasures.

The women of Hardup were not advocates of outdoor sports and pleasures, and Hulda knew that whenever her form was seen on the hill-side, she was alluded to as the "Tom boy." The leaders of society in Hardup affected paler cheeks than she had, and young ladies could not ruffle their dresses according to the prevailing styles, and run the hills also. And so, fearing ridicule, this red cheeked girl hid her love of hills and trees and flowers. But she kept her tryst with all the flowers as they gayly followed each other through the cool spring grasses. The wild flowers were her teachers, and like them she kept more and more away from the beaten paths of Hardup life.

She had every reason to believe that she would know her fate from the County Board of Examination by mail on the following Monday night. Monday was a long day, despite her exertions to shorten it. She brought out all the soiled clothes and turned the kitchen and back-porch into a laundry. Then she cleaned windows, and hung fresh muslin curtains in the sitting-room. Night-fall found everything about the little home in perfect order. She had intended to watch for the stage, and when it came, to run down to the office, for if the news was, that she had

failed she could bear it better alone. But just at sundown David put his great square shoulders and laughing face into the kitchen, and she knew by his Sunday coat that he had come to spend the evening. That meant extra work for supper. Then the teacher came in, in dressing-gown and slippers, and said he would be going down town after tea, and he would bring up the mail.

Hulda's dark eyes snapped wrathfully at him as he went out of the room, which drew a laugh from David. "I suppose the old man inspects your mail," he said, as Hulda compressed her lips and spread on the tea plates with considerable clatter.

"Ah, well," he continued, "I suppose you'll be leaving your kind guardian for a school in the back woods."

"The farther back the better!" cried the girl.

"Yes," went on her tormentor, "and it won't be a week before that antiquated old mummy up-stairs will be around borrowing my mule to go and see you."

Hulda brandished the carving knife over his head.

"See here, girl, don't kill me with that dull old thing. Let me sharpen it up for you. Where's your whet-stone?"

"Yes," she said, "you may as well be of some use, Dave."

She brought him her box of knives and was bending over him showing him just how she wanted her chopping knife sharpened, when the door opened softly, and the teacher entered with his usual catlike tread. Mr. Cornman, from his habits of commanding and

practicing order and quiet in the school-room, had become a constant illustration of all his rules. His voice was usually the first indication of his presence in a room. Hulda started and flushed with nervousness when she heard his voice.

"Quite a domestic scene," he said, rubbing his hands over the stove. David glanced up and saw an expression back of the teacher's cold smile that he did not altogether like. Hulda went quickly out to the kitchen to bring in the tea. David finished the knives, and then leaned back against the wall in a mood of unusual silence and thoughtfulness; he did not speak till Mrs. Hardy placed his chair and beckoned him to the tea table. Evidently some new pot of humor was on to brew.

Tea went on in silence, and, after unusual delay, it seemed to Hulda the teacher arose, slowly removed his faded dressing gown and put on his coat and overcoat. Then he put on his overshoes in the hall, and came again into the room to roll his wool muffler around his neck. Hulda watched his preparations behind the tea pot with aching nerves. She could have flown to the office and back while he was buckling his overshoes.

David sat in a corner, whistled softly, and patted his knees in a most aggravating manner. Finally the school-teacher went out. Hulda followed him to the door, and saw him fairly out of the gate. Then she returned, slammed the door behind her, and threw herself against it, in an attitude of hopeless patience. David came out of his corner.

"I give him just two hours at that rate," he said. "Come, Hulda, you poor martyr, let's wash the dishes and have a game of chess before he gets back. Won't he make an agreeable husband, though? You can go to Jericho and back while he is turning around."

"Yes," cried the girl, carrying out her arms full of dishes, "but he won't get married. He'll never get ready."

"Don't you be too sure," said David, following her out with the rest. "I bet I can make the old fellow propose to you in less than three months."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"O, Dave, you can't. How?"

"Easy enough. I'll make him think I want you myself."

"Which you do," she cried, falling in with the joke and laughing merrily.

After that it became quiet in the little house. The dishes were put away, Mrs. Hardy sat sewing where the light was best, and Hulda had forgotten her troubles watching David's queen. A low shuffle at the front door announced Mr. Cornman's return. He came in as methodically as he went out. He removed his overshoes with care and placed them outside. Then his overcoat, muffler and hat were, one at a time, removed and hung in place on the rack. He carefully smoothed his hair, then came into the room, closed the door softly with the aid of both hands, and seeing nothing to further delay him, pro-

duced from his inner pocket, a long, yellow envelope. Hulda sprang forward and snatched it, but it was again snatched and David held it high over her head.

"Quit tormenting the poor girl," pleaded Mrs. Hardy.

"Who's been tormenting her?" said David.

Hulda bit her lip, then sat down over the chess board.

"It's your move, Dave." David dropped the letter in her lap, and carefully removed the chess board. Then Hulda sprang up and waved a bit of crisp buff paper in the air. Cornman looked at it in amazement.

"It's a First Grade County Certificate," she cried.

She dropped it in her mother's lap and ran out of the room. David found her a little later leaning over the front gate, quietly shedding tears of relief and joy, against her old red shawl.

"Well, good-night, Hulda," he said, "you're all right now."

"Dave," she whispered, "wait."

"Well, what is it?"

"Dave, you mustn't make so much fun of the teacher. It was by his help, you know, that I succeeded."

"Oh, bother! you'd have got it any way."

"No, I wouldn't. Now don't ridicule him to his face. He's not young like us, Dave."

"Oh, well, if you really mean it, I'll quit—"

"For always?"

David was striding away, his hands in his pocket. He turned back and whispered, "Till to-morrow."

There was no use trying to manage David. But for the next month David managed Hulda quite to his satisfaction. He declared that she needed a rest from her books, and several times a week he appeared at the cottage to take the rather unwilling girl to some social, "sing" or meeting of the "Dime Society."

And the society, which these gatherings constituted in Hardup, opened its arms kindly to the young woman just awakening from the lethargy of girlhood. She had achieved considerable local distinction for her success before the Board of Examination, and some of the good matrons in town openly favored what they chose to consider her engagement to David, for, according to their ideas, marriage with a good honest man was much better than "teaching school," as they expressed it. And so Hulda had many invitations to come and spend the afternoon, and bring her mother and stay "till after tea."

Hulda, in the meanwhile, by the advice of Mr. Cornman, sent her applications here and there to the trustees of country schools. But some never employed young teachers, some never employed women, others had sent East for teachers, and so there seemed to be but little chance for her.

"Well, never mind," she said to her mother, "I'll take up the carpets and clean house, and by that time something may happen."

CHAPTER IX.

CHERRY VALLEY.

It was on one Monday morning in the last week of April, that Hulda stood on the little back porch of the cottage, with her sleeves rolled up, and her white arms plunged into a tub of foamy suds.

The sun shone brightly across the clean floor, and a view into the kitchen showed that order had been established there before the washing began. The birds sang in the fruit trees that brushed against the wall of the house. Bruno, the quiet old dog, sat on the step wagging his tail, uneasily intent on watching some pigs, that were hunting around on the outside for a weak place to get in the orchard fence. He looked at Hulda anxiously, with his ears erect, begging for permission to show his dislike of the intruders. But the girl was intent on her own thoughts.

The studies of the long winter, and the social pleasure of the spring with David, were all over, and life with her was now uneventful. It was a vacation in the school and the teacher was away. David had gone on his usual round of spring prospecting. In these quiet days, more than before, Hulda had been thinking of Cis Beverly and her long silence. She and her mother had talked it all over many times by the seclusion of the evening fireside. She had once

walked out to the Beverly home, to see if the old people were comfortable, and to elicit information if she could. She found the old couple happy over a letter they had received. Cis had sent them some money, and said she was well and working in a candy store, and would come home when she had saved more money. The letter was a long rambling mixture full of love and remembrances to all the farm pets; even the birds that nested in the porch were not forgotten.

Hulda had looked at the mild old people sitting so calmly by the fire talking of their chickens, their garden, the cow and fruit trees; and then she rose with a sigh, resolved to carry her heavy secret alone, rather than disturb their peace.

"Law, now, ye're not goin' till I make ye a cup of tea," had said the little grandmother, dropping her knitting onto the cushion of the chair, and crowning her face with glasses on top of her white cap.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Stop and have a bite with us, now do," had also urged the grandfather. "Ma, I'll go right down cellar and get you a can of cherries."

So Hulda had staid, and was quite comforted by the trust and patience of the good old people, and the homely comforts of the quiet little rooms.

She passed her opinion on the new calf, climbed into the loft and pitched down sufficient hay to last several weeks, set some hens for grandma, and then hurried home with her problem unsolved.

This morning in April, as she turned the strange

secret over in her mind, there was no trace of any shadow of it in her bright eye and healthful, glowing face. She could hear the clatter of the sewing machine in the bedroom, and her mother's voice singing contentedly, "There's peace in the valley of blessing so sweet", and she was glad that her mother seemed to feel no extra worry, on account of the child. The mother had cared for it uncomplainingly. It had been so long since she had rocked a child to sleep, and she was so lonely at times when Hulda was at her books, she had grown to have something of a motherly feeling for the little waif, for such she really believed it to be. So that neither Mrs. Hardy, singing in the bedroom over some blue calico shirts she was making for David, or Hulda, absorbed in her thoughts, heard the noise of a wagon, the click of the gate, and a knock at the front door.

The stranger tapped a few times, then walked around to the back door and came upon the pleasant picture of Hulda, now pinning up the long braid of hair that had fallen over the tubs.

Hulda heard a step and turned to see a plain, kindly looking man with sandy hair and beard, and he was looking at her with an amused twinkle in his eye.

"Does the widow Hardy live here?"

"Yes," said Hulda simply, "will you come in?"

She led the way into the sitting room, the stranger saying as he darkened the door. "I believe it is Miss Hardy I have come to see."

Hulda's heart bounded suddenly, but she spoke to

her mother, and the two women waited for the stranger to explain his errand. He placed his hat on the table, took the proffered chair and began to feel about the pockets of his coat, as if he intended to produce a letter. But he either failed in his search, or abandoned it, for he presently said:

"My name is Woods. I live in Cherry Valley and have come to see if the young lady doesn't want to teach our school. We've just started our district. We've got thirteen or fourteen scholars. You've been recommended to us, and if you want to, come and try it."

"Try it?" said the girl, "I shall be delighted."

"I've no doubt you'll try," said Mr. Woods. "I like the looks of you. I'm glad you know how to wash, and if you'll wash up some of those young 'uns, I won't care."

They all laughed, and Hulda felt some acquainted with the leading trustee of the Cherry Valley school; the next Saturday she rode away with him in the spring-wagon.

Cherry Creek came out of a mountain cañon, and formed itself in a pretty valley, sufficiently wide to be divided into several good farms with rich garden land on the flats, wheat fields on the slopes, and pasturage on the hills above. It was a long, rambling road of fifteen miles from Hardup to Cherry Valley, up and down a long grade, through a cañon, around a mountain, and finally through a hilly country covered with manzanita bushes, scrub oaks and scattering pines.

Hulda, entertained by the pleasant and somewhat jovial Mr. Woods, and full of thoughts of her sudden change and unexpected good luck, took but little notice of the road and mountain scenery, only noticing it when they descended to Cherry Valley and followed the road along the creek.

The road ran along by a rail fence for a mile, and then stopped where the fence changed to one of hewn pickets. Hulda could see through the rows of an orchard the form of a long, low, unpainted building. Immediately she heard children's voices, one of them shouting, "Mamma, mamma, they've come." Three little boys ran down the grassy path, and mounted the fence in an inquisitive row. "There's your first school," said Mr. Woods, as he helped Hulda to the ground. "Hi! you little rascal, jump down from that fence and carry these bundles. Here's one for each of you. Now scamper and show the teacher the way."

Two ran like startled deer to the house, and the oldest, a self-possessed lad of nine years, swung open the gate for Hulda, and looked up inquiringly into her face as they walked in. The girl was not used to children familiarly, and she was trying to think of something to say to the child. The boy kept by her eyeing her from head to foot, evidently only to gratify his own curiosity. There was something on his mind; and finally he turned, walking backward, so that he could see her fairly, and broke out with:—

"Teacher, be you goin' to lick?"

Hulda could not recover herself sufficiently to an-

swer this astonishing question, but a little woman in a dark calico dress flew around the corner. She was a dark haired woman with a kindly face and gentle voice, and a breezy, cheery way, that won the girl's love and confidence at once. She took Hulda's cold, gloved hands, and kissed her as if she had known her always. Then she led her around the building where a long porch ran the length of the house. Through one of the several doors opening into it, they entered the family sitting-room, where a fire blazed cheerily in the fire-place, for it was a cool dusk after a windy day.

"Don't you know," said little Mrs. Woods, drawing out a large rocker, "I am so glad you have come, even if it wasn't to teach. I suppose Mr. Woods has told you, that this is the only place to board. I like it here ever so much, but I do get lonesome. I used to have such nice neighbors back in Indiana."

The young girl had not yet learned the art of opening a lively conversation about nothing, so she said simply, "I am afraid I shall not be much company." But Mrs. Woods answered hopefully:

"We shall not worry about that, Miss Hardy. There now, go away, all of you," she continued to the three little flaxen heads that appeared in the doorway.

"Papa's bringing the trunk," said the eldest, hoping the item of news would make an excuse for his presence. Heavy steps were heard outside, and when the trunk appeared, Hulda discovered that the room allotted to her was a new addition that had been

made by siding up the end of the porch. Mrs. Woods showed her the small apartment, and Hulda was charmed with the novel room. The door opened onto the porch, and the window had a pretty view of the hills. Mrs. Woods, herself, had lined and papered the room, the bed was snowy white, and a large braided rug covered the clean rag carpet.

Hulda closed the door, while Mrs. Woods drew the three boys away, and she knelt and unlocked her trunk, thankful that she had found so acceptable a home. There was a place behind the door to hang her dresses. She placed upon the tiny table by the low window the books she had brought with her, a Latin grammar and lexicon, Cæsar and Virgil, and four well-worn blue volumes of poems, the works of Mrs. Browning and Mrs. Hemans. These four blue volumes had been her companions from childhood. Milton, Tupper, and Tennyson, she had read as tasks set by her mother, and she had neglected the Shakespeare Mr. Cornman had charged her to study, to read over and over the lines of Mrs. Browning, that were full of thoughts she could understand. Now as she felt the first pang of loneliness, she took one of the blue volumes and laid it against her cheek. But she was calm and unemotional on the threshold of her new future, and as unwarned and unprepared for the common troubles and sorrows of a girl's life, away from home, as poor Cis Beverly when she shook her curls on the streets of the great city.

The mental food furnished by Mrs. Browning, however delicately served, did not meet the needs of a

young mind in this new and unformed country. No one enters life prepared for it. But whatever weakness she felt then, was speedily comforted by this little blue book laid against the red bloom of her cheek, and a swift flitting through her mind of the sweet thoughts of Mrs. Browning.

Then there came a little step and a timid knock at the door, then a louder knock and a boy's voice calling, "Teacher, supper's ready." Hulda opened the door to three little serious faces that faded away in the dark, and she followed them through the sitting-room into a plain, bare little dining-room.

Alex, the eldest and the boldest, proudly drew a chair for her to the round table, set for tea, and then passed into a further room from which she heard his voice in a loud whisper, "She's in there."

Mrs. Woods came in with covered dishes in her hands, and the boy came back and took his stand where he could command the best view of the object of his curiosity.

Mr. Woods, red and fresh from his wash-pan ablutions, came in leading the second boy, also rosy and fresh.

"Miss Hardy, what do you think of this boy for a scholar?" he said, lifting him up and placing him in his chair, where the child dropped his head and covered his eyes with his fingers. The father then dragged in the last one.

"This," he said, crowding him into a high chair, which he had outgrown, is our four year old Trumball, Trummy for short. It won't be long till he can go to school."

Trummy hid behind his tin plate, which he refused to put down till finally compelled by his mother. Alex, the eldest, needed no introduction, for he promptly slid into a chair at the teacher's side, watching her all the time with restless eyes, and only prevented from talking by the remanding glances of his mother.

Mr. and Mrs. Woods were so kind and defferential to the young teacher, and so cheerful withal, that Hulda began to feel a higher estimation of herself, and a strength and dignity equal to the demands of her position, came to her aid.

A strength a little tried, when Alex, unable longer to contain himself, cried out:

"The Dormses, they said they didn't want no Yankee teacher."

But she joined Mr. Woods' laugh, and relieved Mrs. Woods' embarrassment by her merry composure.

After tea, Mrs. Woods, with her motherly manner, put Hulda into the rocking chair before the sitting room fire, built more for cheer than for warmth; a bright lamp was placed on a round table near her, and she felt at home as the family gathered around. They might have been her own home folks, so easily did they adapt themselves to the presence of a stranger.

Alex brought his book and slate, his marbles, and a box of much treasured rock specimens, to the teacher's lap; then he would have given her a complete description of all the horses, pigs, and chickens

on the place, but his mother remanded him to the corner to amuse his brothers, while she, with a little coat to patch, took the post of honor by the guest.

Mrs. Woods was one of those pleasant, plain women, whose prettiness consists mainly in the real goodness that predominates in the expression of the face and the general manner. Hulda watched her with admiring eyes, as she deftly ran her needle in and out, darning each little hole or spot; and Mrs. Woods, glancing in the pauses of her work, was not unmindful of the attractiveness of the girl by her side, who folded her hands awkwardly, as if unaccustomed to inaction; and yet, who bore herself in her girlish dress, with graceful dignity. Hulda had been training her hair to correspond with her new honors, and it now lay in a great coil on top of her head, without art or form, looking as if it might fall any moment on her shapely shoulders.

In the two years Mrs. Woods had been in her new foot hill home, she had found few congenial people among her scattered neighbors, and she regarded the coming of a teacher to board with her, as a happy break in her monotonous life. She had hoped to see an older person, but the girl had such a thoughtful, though girlish face, that she at once felt drawn to her.

"Shall I tell you something about the people here, and the children?" she asked, hesitatingly. "I know it would help you. Well, there is the Dorms family." Just then Mr. Woods tramped across the dining-room and looked in ready to join the family.

"Don't tell her about the Dormses, she'll find that out soon enough," he said. Mrs. Woods looked up with a frown broken by a quick smile.

"Abram, did you feed the calves? I left the milk on the stove." Abram's face fell a full length.

"I forgot it, slick as a whistle. Alex, come and help father with the calves."

Alex followed his father and Mrs. Woods continued:

"You see the Dorms family are democrats and they will send five, and the Bates are republicans, and they will send six. They are neighbors, and have trouble, of course, about stock, and between the boundary lines and politics, even the children war when they meet each other."

Hulda opened her eyes roundly; this was discouraging information.

"But I hope they will behave at school. Buck Dorms is nineteen, and Millie Bates is sixteen, and such a big, overgrown girl!"

Here Abram again interrupted the conversation and drew a chair to the circle. He had just seated himself, when his wife snapped a thread and looked up.

"Did you put in the lambs? It might shower."

Evidently Abram was forgetting the chores. Company was a rare event, so isolated were they on the large farms in the days before Cherry Valley became a solid greenery of fruit trees. Mr. Woods raised his hands with an expression of despair; then he turned to Alex.

"Sonny, can't you take the lantern and put the lambs in the shed for father?"

Alex came forward quickly, proud of being considered of so much utility before the teacher, yet he stood at the door hesitating. Hulda thought of the usual child-fear of the dark. She sprang up with animation.

"Do let me go," she said, "I want to see the lambs."

Alex was joyfully relieved, and the two went out together across the grasses and clover in the orchard, Hulda carrying the lantern, and the boy increasing in self-importance at every step. Three little feeble lambs were taken from the clover beds and shut under shelter, then the eager boy took his companion into the barn, showing her the horses and colts, and entertaining her with an unbroken stream of anecdotes about the family pets.

"We're going to ride Mary and old Block to school," he said, "till Lila and Dick get broke. Can you break horses? Millie Bates can."

Hulda kept her consciousness of inferiority to herself. She had never had an opportunity to learn to ride any kind of a horse. But after breakfast the next morning, she told Mrs. Woods, and this good woman immediately arranged to give her some instruction in riding. Abram brought "Mary and old Block" up to the porch, the side-saddle was put on Mary, and Hulda was mounted by Mr. Woods, with many instructions. Mrs. Woods strapped a blanket onto "Old Block," put her foot into her husband's palm, sprang lightly on the horse and started him at once down the path and out into the open road. Mary followed her mate, and Mrs. Woods stopped to give the new rider further instructions.

They proceeded slowly up the green, level valley, across the bottom lands where the grain was thick and high, over the shallow creek and up a slope, till they came to a little, new, pine school-house set on the rocky brow of the hill. They dismounted here, and opened the unpainted door, and glanced in at the rude furniture and rough walls. But it seemed all good and pleasant to the young, ambitious girl. It was a situation, and a chance to earn something. So she pleased Mrs. Woods by praising everything, and they remounted and rode down the hill.

Mrs. Woods, in turn, praised Hulda's ability to learn to ride so quickly, and when she grew more at home in the saddle, they urged the horses to a gallop. She was lifted from her saddle at the house by Mr. Woods, with many expressions of approval, and the next morning she went off like an old rider on Mary with Alex and Trummy on "Old Block", and the tin lunch pails in the horns of the saddles.

After Mr. Cornman's full instructions, Hulda was at home at once in her little school. The Dorms family did not come at first, for the reason, so it was rumored, that the new clothes absolutely necessary for their appearance in public had not been completed by their toiling mother.

So the six "Bateses," the three "Joneses," the two "Woodses" and several barefooted children, who came from different directions over the stony hills, constituted the little school, upon which Hulda concentrated her mind. Millie Bates was a plump, rosy-cheeked girl who took slowly to her books, said "yes,

mam" to all questions, and spent much of her time looking dreamily from the windows. This young girl, whose only social advantages were country dances, and whose literature consisted of her school-books and the Waverly magazine, was, notwithstanding, somewhat in advance of her serious-eyed teacher in the experiences that usually make up a young woman's life.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIDE.

"You just wait till the Dormses come. Won't we have fun then?" said Alex, from behind Trummy, on the back of old Block, one afternoon in May, as they were riding home from school.

Hulda smiled; she was not sure that the activity whatever it was, would be fun to her. She playfully tapped old Block with her whip, and, while the boys galloped on ahead, she fell into an uneasy train of thought. A month from home, and only one letter from her mother. The isolated Cherry Valley people did not hear often from the postoffice at Bird's Flat, and Hulda's one letter had been bare of news. She was thinking much these long fair days of her mother's care at home, and the nameless little stranger in her arms; so with a sigh of loneliness she slid wearily from the gentle Mary, at the kitchen porch of the farmhouse. At once Mrs. Woods, with flour on her hands and face, ran to bring her a letter. With her riding-skirt falling about her feet and standing against the shoulder of patient Mary, a strangling bunch of wild flowers falling to pieces from her throat, Hulda bent her flushed face over the single white sheet of paper. At once her eyes were fastened on

these lines, and she kept reading them over and over:

"Could you possibly come home for Saturday and Sunday? Grandpa Beverly just went by and he said Cis would be home to-morrow. You must be here to see her."

A new shadow of care fell over the girl's heart. The mystery would be explained, but would not the cause of her presence in the city have to be explained? That was something she liked less and less to think of. Hulda removed the saddle and bridle from Mary, who turned at once into the green clover of the orchard, and the girl, with a grave face, went into the clean, tidy kitchen where Mrs. Woods was kneading a mass of white dough. Hulda had learned to tell her vexations to this bright, patient woman, and it was easy now to tell her that she must be at home on Saturday.

Mrs. Woods knit her brows. "Is it so very serious?" she said. "We will talk it over at supper. Go and rest now, child, you look tired."

Mr. Woods also came to the table with knit brows. It was fifteen miles to Hardup, and over a mountain road. "If you could get to Bird's Flat by eight o'clock Saturday morning," he said, "you could catch a stage, but there is no stage back till Monday. If I didn't have to use the team in the orchard, I'd let you have Mary."

Mrs. Woods laughed. "Mary! It would take her forever. Mary can't go."

"Oh, I know," cried Alex. "Let her ride Lila. Lila's fast enough."

"She'd throw the teacher too, fast enough, added his father. Hulda's heart bounded. If she could only ride that beautiful pony all the way to Hardup, to fly over the hills and mountains, straight to the solution of the secret that lay upon her young heart. Mrs. Woods saw the sparkle of her eye, and the sudden color on her cheek.

"Maybe Lila's gentler than we think," she said to her husband. "I might ride her to-night and see."

So that evening, in the moonlight, the beautiful black Lila was led up to the porch, and the saddle adjusted.

"You see," said Mr. Woods, as he slowly tightened the girth, "I bought her of some stockmen, she may have been ridden more than we think. But she goes off like a flash; easy as a rocker to ride, but shy as a deer. But if you can learn to ride her you'd be safe enough."

Mrs. Woods came out and threw the riding skirt over the saddle. Lila started and looked wildly at it; but dropped her head to take a bit of sugar from the hand of her mistress. Then Mrs. Woods sprang lightly into the saddle, and her husband led the horse about the yard.

"All right," said Mrs. Woods, after a while, "open the gate." Alex ran and opened the gate, and Lila danced out, held with a firm rein by her fearless rider.

Thursday night Hulda was mounted, and after an hour's training Mr. Woods thought it safe enough for her to start away alone on Lila to Hardup.

"You see," he said, "you can leave here by four

o'clock Friday, and get within five miles of home by night, and you'll not be afraid to go the rest of the way by moonlight."

So the rude schoolhouse was locked at three o'clock on Friday, and when the teacher reached the farmhouse with the boys, a warm lunch was waiting for her, and Lila was fretting at her halter. "Keep cool, now," said Mr. Woods, as he put Hulda in the saddle. "Don't get excited, hold her in, the first mile, if you can, then let her go like the wind till she gets tired; then you'll have no trouble."

But Hulda was excited as she held Lila's tossing head, and she forgot to say "Good by" to her friends, as the horse pranced through the gate, and bounded up the gravelly road. But she settled herself into her saddle with a feeling of exultation. It was to be her first free, unrestrained horseback ride, and a feeling of freedom hightened her spirits and dispelled her fear. One feels a new possession of the heavens and earth when mounted on a swift and easy motioned horse.

In an hour the quiet, studious teacher of Cherry Valley was changed into a glowing spirited creature, dashing through the young pines of the divide. Reaching a long, level stretch she began to remember her instructions, and reined Lila to a walk. Lila, already wet and foaming, dropped her pretty head, and for a mile or two went slowly and quietly along the high, level divide, Hulda, looking over the hill tops into the forest below, and noting the flowers under the brush-wood by the road. Then she noticed the

lengthening shadows, and with a word Lila broke into a swift gallop, and her hoof beats on the hard road sounded clearly through the quiet woods.

It was all a delight to Hulda; she had no thought of fear or loneliness. She would like to have such a ride every day on Lila. She had a wild, undefined feeling that it would be better to ride on and on over the great Sierras, and far away, than to go on with the conditions of her life. But it was but a momentary vision of fear. Home was sweet and life was precious.

After a while she began to descend, and the pines stood taller and closer, and shapeless masses of rock stood up about her. After winding around the slopes she came suddenly to a point, and descended a graded road on the mountain side.

She was startled a moment to notice how long the shadows were, but the sunlight still lay bright and broad on the other side of the cañon.

The solitude of the cañon impressed her, as Lila dropped into a rapid walk down the grade. There was no sound of wind, or call of bird, and even the squirrels had disappeared from the gathering shadows. A path came into the road from a depression or valley in the mountain side. She knew that these trails led into other roads, out to some settler's lonely cabin, or up to some red, yawning deserted shaft. A longing of her childhood came to her to know what was at the end of the trail, but there was no time for prospecting, so she hurried Lila, and presently they were at the turn at the bottom of the grade. Here

a little stream of water ran into a log trough, then formed a pool in the road, and went over the bank into the ferns below. But there was something about the trough that displeased Lila, perhaps the scent of some wild beast of the forest; any way she shied suddenly, and stood on the edge of the rock wall that supported the road. Hulda whirled her back to a place of safety, but Lila was sure there was something uncanny about the trough, and refused to approach it.

Yet she was thirsty and decided to reach for a little quiet pool of water down among the rocks. It was a long stretch for her neck, and finally, with a little jerk, the rein parted in Hulda's hand, the ends falling on either side into the water. Before the inexperienced rider had time to move, Lila, frightened at the dangling reins, sprang back, turned and started on the road home in a wild run. Her rider, now equally frightened, leaned forward and clung to Lila's mane, helplessly. Lila became more excited, running faster, and then Hulda saw that her saddle was loose, and she knew her balance was not good. She thought of jumping in some way, if she could only free her foot from the stirrup. She was trying to catch her reins, and she kept her mind sufficiently, to decide, that if she could not catch them, that she would jump, where the trail came into the road. There might be a house near there. She saw the spot ahead where she had decided to jump, and in trying to free her foot, she felt her saddle turn under her. The picture of her awful peril flashed across her mind.

Just at that moment a large, white horse, bearing an erect rider came out of the tree-shaded trail to the road. The rider was on his feet in a moment. He had just time to catch Lila's flying reins, to regain his feet, and catch Hulda in his arms, as the saddle turned under her. Momentarily stunned by her fright, Hulda opened her eyes and looked up at the calm, smiling face of Edward La Grange.

"There, I knew you had better sense than to faint," said this calm young man. "Now just steady yourself a moment while I get your foot out of that trap. What are you riding this kind of a horse without a stirrup-slipper for? There don't tremble so, girl, sit down on the bank and catch your breath while I tie the horse."

"Oh, I am so glad you came," stammered the girl as she sat down on the bank and leaned against a tree. She was very weak.

"Well, I think so. You might have escaped with a broken ankle, you might have not escaped at all." He was adjusting Lila's saddle, and tying her by the halter to a slender tree. Then he picked up Hulda's fallen hat and sat down by her. She was pinning up her disordered braids.

"Now," he said, "there is a house only a quarter of a mile up this trail, and if you need anything I will take you up there. Perhaps all you need is a rest."

She looked gratefully at him.

"Yes, I am only frightened. But oh, Mr. La Grange, what can I say to you." He stopped her by a warm clasp over her cold, trembling hand.

"Don't say anything. Get you a slipper before you ride again, and be sure and keep your saddle girth tight. Where are you going any way, you are a long way from Cherry Creek."

Hulda started up in alarm.

"Why, I am going to Hardup. I must hurry. See how late it is getting. O, dear, can I ever get on that horse again?"

La Grange laughed.

"You will have to get on that horse again, if you don't want to spoil her. You will have to rest till you are over your fright. Just take it cool. I will go a ways with you. I am breaking horses for one of my trustees, and I can ride this horse all night if I want to." Hulda went and patted Lila's neck. She was grateful, though she knew not how to say so.

"You see," went La Grange, "I have a good many trades, as I told you. Bird's Flat, where I teach, is only seven miles from here. I shall get home soon enough. By the way, if you feel like it, suppose you tell me how your horse got frightened."

Hulda, her arm over Lila's neck told her story, while she looked at La Grange sitting at ease on the bank, twirling his whip, his dark hair thrown back in shining waves, his strong face in relief against the green foliage of the bank. Something came to her that was new in her young life. A consciousness of happiness in the present moment. Her gratitude to La Grange was mingled with a sense of trust and restfulness in his presence. Further than that, although an unusually intellectual girl, she could not



Hulda has a narrow escape.

David of Juniper Guich.

analyze her sensations. She did not know that an impression was then stamped upon her heart, that would never wear away.

We seldom come to Love's estate gradually; it is more like a sudden sunrise that shows us a fair and delightful land, and though we may never enter into that land, yet the warmth of the sunlight never passes away. And Hulda, in her innocence, opened her heart to the sweetness and light, and the lonely forest seemed suddenly fair and cheerful. Her existence, that had always seemed to be looking forward to something, seemed to be plethoric with present content, but she did not know why.

La Grange came and petted Lila and praised her beauty, then he led her up to the bank and mounted Hulda without allowing her a moment's hesitation. Hulda was reassured by his composure. He sprang onto his horse, and they galloped down the grade and up on the other side.

The sun was just taking his last touches from the tops of the pines. Oh, the gladness and gayety of that ride, and the wild beauty of the night! The light words and bits and laughter mingled musically with the clattering of the hoof beats on the hard road.

Then the horses dropped to a walk and fretted their heads against the firmly held bridles. The moon was gleaming down the road, as they came to the top of the grade. The feeling of friendliness between the two young people grew as they watered their horses at a farmer's road-side well. After that, houses and small orchards appeared more often, and

they were nearing the saucer-like country where lay the town of Hardup.

La Grange drew rein, as they came around the point of a hill, and they could see the humble roofs of Hardup, among the trees.

"Now, good night," he said. "Be sure and have your saddle all right when you start Sunday. I hope we will meet again." He extended his hand from the saddle. "I have enjoyed my ride. Good night."

She had only time to say "Good night" over his hand, and he was gone, and as she rode on the dream light on her girl's heart was as changefully bewitching as the full, glamorous moonlight on the little sleeping valley.

Lila and her rider came swiftly down the slope, over the creek, through the quiet streets and up to the little house where two lights awaited her home coming,—one in the west bedroom where her mother sat, the other in the upper front gable, where Joseph Cornman sat listening for some sound announcing the expected daughter of the house. But he was listening for wagon wheels; so Hulda tied her horse, and came around to the back door and into her mother's room. Her mother came and kissed her quietly without emotion. It was not her way to make any excitement over anything.

"You are late, Hulda," she said, how did you come? I thought you ought to be here, if you could. But, my! how you have changed! Teaching does you good, daughter."

Hulda threw off her hat and gloves. She laughed, glowing with health and vigor.

"Everything does me good, mother. O, I am so hungry! What am I going to do with my horse?"

The Hardup teacher had come softly to the door, and heard her last words. He offered to take her horse to the livery stable. Hulda went out with him. She loved Lila, and she almost hated to have a stranger touch her; she gave her reluctantly to Mr. Cornman, who thought her altogether too gay a horse for an amateur rider; then the girl ran into the house, glad to be alone with her mother.

"Have you seen Cis? Has she taken Nonie?" was her first eager question.

"I saw her at the postoffice a moment yesterday," said the mother. "I drew her to one side and told her the baby was well, but she looked at me wild, and said, 'Your cousin's baby, I suppose. I heard about it.' Then I said, 'Hulda will be home Saturday.' 'Oh,' she said, 'then I'll be over early to see her.'"

"Well, well!" ejaculated Hulda. "How did she look, mother?"

"Very pretty and nice, and she behaves well. Hush, now! he might be back and hear us. Come, let me get you something to eat, daughter, it's nine o'clock."

CHAPTER XI.

CIS BEVERLY.

Hulda awoke the next morning from a dull, dreamless state with a premonition of evil on her heart. Yet when she had roused herself, the image of La Grange came before her eyes, and she sprang out of her low, old fashioned bed, so close to the roof, with a sudden flush on her cheek. Life was somehow growing brighter and dearer. Then she thought of the Hardup people. She would be proud to show them how dignified and mature she had grown. Then she thought of the pines, and all at once, a run through the orchard and a dash into the woods, seemed the sweetest thing in life. She crept downstairs quietly, and went out into the starry morning twilight.

The grass was long and thick in the orchard, for her mother had not tended to the plowing. She parted the low, odorous boughs and went into the pine thicket. She was a dull, bashful, dreamless girl, when she had shaken the light snow from these boughs in the past winter, and now she was so spirited and full of thought. She loved the wood with a new affection. She was not alone there—there was a thrill at her heart, a touch on her hand; and the vision of an erect head, a proud bearing and a fear-

less eye, haunted her closer. Then she smiled over her silly fancy, dashed under the pines and sought the long path where she used to love to wake the birds from their morning slumbers.

Mrs. Hardy was starting the fire in the kitchen, when Hulda came bounding in, fresh and bright, and ready to help carry the household burdens of the day.

Mr. Cornman came to breakfast in his Sunday coat instead of the usual threadbare dressing-gown. This attempt to be pleasing had a benumbing effect on the young school-mistress, but after a time she brightened up with an effort, and answered his many questions about her school. This interest seemed to her to be half sarcasm but after all, his help had been valuable to her, and she tried to be patient. He lingered at the table and watched the girl with a manner of deep and quiet calculation. Afterwards he went out in the town.

Mrs. Hardy shut herself in her room with Nonie and her sewing, and Hulda tied on an apron and swiftly placed the little sitting-room in order; then she washed the dishes, and turned her attention to the making of a cake, that would be needed, in case, she thought, should any one call. The old cat purred about her feet, the linnets and chickadee-birds in the orchard kept up a merry twittering. A peach tree by the window thrust its branches through the lifted sash, its twigs heavy with downy, green, little peaches.

Hulda beat the mixture as faithfully as she had seen her mother do it, then having toned the oven to just the right heat, she closed the iron door on the cake.

She snatched the broom to sweep, in the interval of waiting, when she heard a little tapping on the front door, a rush of light feet, and a rustling of skirts through the hall and dining-room; the door opened and two perfumed arms were swung around her neck, and Cis Beverly kissed her on the lips and shook her hands, with the warmest and sweetest of greetings. She wore a neat, black costume, a stylish jacket, a cap glistening with black beads, and her yellow hair cut short, curled all over her head and around her face.

"Oh, you dear old girl!" she cried. "What a grand young lady you've got to be. Oh, what a long time it's been since I saw you! Speak to me; aren't you glad to see me? I came over just as soon as I could this morning."

Hulda stood looking at her stupidly. Was this the girl who had been secretly married, and had heartlessly flung her secret and her child onto her for safe keeping? She looked so pretty and winning, so innocent of any trouble or deceit. But Hulda's first and only thought was that she had come to explain everything and claim the child; so she began to speak at once of the mystery that had been such a care to her honest heart.

"Why, yes, Cis, I am glad to see you. Haven't I been looking for a letter from you every day this year? But that was a queer way to do, Cis, to push the baby off on me without my consent. Why didn't you come to see me? I would have kept your secret. It was just terrible to get home alone

with that baby, and not know anything about it, and have to tell a lie to everybody to fix it up. O, I am so glad you have come at last! Come in the bedroom where mother is. Aren't you dying to see poor little Nonie?"

Cis had dropped into a chair and sat looking up at her with wide, dilated, blue eyes, and a paling face. Cis had recovered from her misfortune as best she could, after discovering the base character of Max Royse. She had been a deceived girl, not a bad one, and when she found that all traces had been so carefully covered up for her in San Francisco, she had resolved to hide her mishap, and go on as if nothing had happened. She had called on Mrs. Ellis and begged to know the truth about the child. Mrs. Ellis, having no doubt but that Max had rescued the baby from the country girl, and placed it in some Infant Home, told Cis what she supposed to be the truth, and gave her soon practical advice.

"Don't try to find the baby," she had said. "There is no one to tell your secret. Go to your home if you have one, and live a virtuous life, that is the best, after all."

And this Cis had concluded to do. She found a place in a store, and staid long enough to earn money to go home in good style. She had regained her health and spirits, and knowing the value of a home with her own people, she resolved to be happy and useful. And now to have her old friend meet her with this strange account of a baby called Nonie, and to be calling it hers was a catastrophe she had not anticipated.

But she had had enough experience with the world, to think fast and well while Hulda was speaking. She resolved to find out all that Hulda knew before committing herself in any way. She sat looking dumbly at her friend, while Hulda was waiting for her to reply.

Hulda went up to her and placed her hand gently on her shoulder.

"Cis, dear, what is it? Are you in trouble? Come, tell me all about it. You know, I know nothing about it now. I will help you. I have helped you, and I will again."

Hulda had exposed the weakness of her position, and the more worldly-wise woman, saw it in an instant. She shrank back and assumed a cold, aggrieved tone.

"Well, I am sure I don't know what you are talking about. For goodness sake, explain yourself. Whose baby? I'm not in any trouble? What do you mean?" She raised her head defiantly and looked at her astonished friend.

Hulda felt a sinking of her strength, and a fluttering of her heart, but she made another strategic error, and resolved to explain her story explicitly. She shut and locked the kitchen doors, and then came and stood by the stony, silent girl, and in trembling tones, told how she had come in possession of the child they had called Nonie Graham.

She told of her own awkward adventure, for she instinctively felt that Cis would not betray her confidence, which was a correct supposition in any case.

Cis listened to it all, with the same stony stare, but with her mind keenly active. It was all very clear to her. Mrs. Ellis had made some mistake and then simply lied her way out of it. As for Hulda, she ought not to have opened the basket; no smart girl would have done it, and she felt no pity for her. But she saw that Hulda's remarkable discretion in inventing a parentage for the child was another loop hole of escape for her. She saw, too, that Hulda could not betray her without revealing her own foolish and hazardous adventure.

Before Hulda had finished telling her story slowly and painfully, Cis had laid her plan and gathered sufficient presence of mind to carry it out.

"And now," said Hulda, when she had finished, "come and see the baby." She led the way to the bedroom, and Cis followed, smiling composedly. Pale, delicate Nonie lay on the bed, and Mrs. Hardy sat sewing by the window. She rose and kissed Cis cordially; Cis responded quietly, then stood at the foot of the bed looking fixedly at the child.

"Do you recognize your baby?" said Mrs. Hardy. "I suppose now you have come to tell us all about it. We have guarded your secret perfectly."

Cis threw up her hands with a wild, aggrieved look. "I am sure I don't know anything about it," she cried. "That isn't my baby. How dare you say that I have had a baby? You ought to be arrested for slander."

Mother and daughter looked at each other with paling, horrified faces. Mrs. Hardy recovered herself

first. "Hulda," she said calmly, "get those things, the chain and note."

Hulda went to the closet and brought out a bundle and unrolled it before the unabashed young woman. There was the little dress made of the familiar muslin, the frail gold chain that was so well known to each of them, and the writing on the paper, "Take good care of my baby. I have named her Nonie. I will come and claim her soon." Cis glanced at the articles, then snatched the chain, with a well affected exclamation of surprise.

"Why, that is my chain! Why, upon my word I gave it to Jenny Jones, the girl that roomed with me on Eddy Street. And I gave her my old dress too. Well, well, I just bet Jennie Jones is at the bottom of this whole thing. I thought something was wrong with her then.

Hulda lifted up the shawl. "Yes, Jennie too that, too," continued Cis. Hulda placed before her eyes the bit of paper. Cis took it in her hand and examined it closely. "That's Jennie's handwriting," she said. Then she turned to Mrs. Hardy with a well simulated light laugh.

"Well, you're funny folks to lay this on me. But I can't blame you. It did look like it. You was good to bring it home, Hulda, thinking it was for me, but I guess you'll have to keep it now, for Jennie Jones is too smart for anything. She used all my things on purpose." Then she started to go out of the room, and after hesitating a moment, turned back.

"For goodness sake, you'd better not tell this thing. People will lay it all on Hulda. I'm sorry I can't help you any."

She went out in the dining-room and sat down by the table drumming on it nervously with her fingers. Hulda stood dumbly looking at her mother, who sat silent, her eyes full of tears. She thought her mother was weeping over her blunder and its consequences to them. Cis was doubtless ignorant of it all, and she had done a foolish thing for a good deed. She went out and looked at Cis.

"But we have said it is our cousin's child," she stammered.

"Never mind, Hulda," Cis said, "I'll write down and see if I can find Jennie Jones. I can make her pay you some money."

Cis went out to the front door making other remarks to strengthen her case, and departed, confident that all was safe.

"Don't cry, mother," said Hulda, going back. "We'll keep the poor little thing."

"It isn't that, Hulda," said the mother, "Cis is deceiving us all through. Don't you see she is perfectly hardened, and made up all that about Jennie Jones. It is dreadful. It will break her poor old grandmother's heart."

"No, it won't, mother," said Hulda firmly, after a moment's thought.

"Why?"

"Because we'll go on and keep the secret just as we have. It won't do to murder poor grandma, to

punish Cis. Beside, mother, don't you see we have told it is our cousin's baby, and we can't get out of that now without other proof. Some day we'll have to imagine a cousin's husband to come and take it away."

She ran suddenly out of the room, and then back with a smoking object in her hand.

"Mother," she cried, "the cake is burned to a cinder. Come, let's make another. Mr. Corman's coming and it's nearly lunch time."

Somehow Hulda's heart was more buoyant than usual, and life, though disappointing, was glad and full of things worth living for.

CHAPTER XII.

DAVID'S BET.

The same day David Strong had come jogging down a canon trail on a fat and gentle old mule. He had been prospecting since the open weather of spring, and had struck a little rich dirt at last in a rough, isolated place he called Juniper Gulch, and as long as the mountain stream ran freely, he had remained there, camping in a little shake cabin, and washing out the gold in his pan. He had seen no one for a month, save a few Chinamen who had come by, one day "Indian file," looking out for new or deserted diggings. He had come out of his little cabin determined to ward off unwelcome observers.

"No catchee him, John," he had said. "No get him gold. All same starve. I get him old horse, I go home."

The Chinese passed on and David had fried his bacon and hoarded his dust in solitude. Not that he liked the solitude, but he liked the gold, and his congenial friends at Hardup would probably learn of his secret only too soon. Like any roving prospector he liked to tell of his luck to his luck's detriment, but this time he had resolved to take out what gold he could for his summer's use and keep his secret and his claim.

The water had now given out, and he was going into Hardup to enjoy his gains. He had burned his cabin, hidden his utensils, and caught up his old mule. There were many children near his home on a hill at Hardup, who always knew by sundry gifts when David had made a strike.

The good minister also, of the weather-beaten Methodist Church, had had occasion to pray more fervently than usual for the spiritual welfare of young Strong, on account of the parcels of groceries that usually appeared on his porch about the times of David's returns. Also poor old grandpa Beverly, whose memory had become unreliable, was forced occasionally to accept twenty dollars from David, who would protest that he had never finished paying for the mule, which he had purchased of the old man years before.

And so David was meditating, as to how he would bring about these little pleasantries, as he rode through the rocky ravines and gullies, into the saucer-like valley surrounding the town of Hardup. But he expected to go to the Hardy cottage first of all, as soon as he had changed his clothes, and deposited his dust at the express office. The Hardys were more like relatives to him, than any one he knew. He liked to think of them as being his own mother and sister. But he had never thought of Hulda as one he would like to marry. This self-willed independent girl pleased and amused him, but her rather heroic qualities did not appeal to the romantic in his nature. Had she lost her eyesight, or met with some

other great personal misfortune, making her utterly dependent on others, then his generous heart might have been led to expend its manly love upon her. But it humored his whim that people should think that he wanted to marry her. He did not care how often he was seen at the Hardy cottage.

This time with his pockets bulging out with oranges, he vaulted over the orchard fence, and tapped at the back door of the Hardy cottage.

"Oh, why, David, is that you? How do you do?" cried Hulda, coming out, drawing the door close behind her, and giving him both her warm hands.

"Thank you, and how's yourself," answered David. "What a glorious skule mam you do make, any way. I do believe you're growing handsome."

"Hush, David, do be still. There's a lot of women here now—callers. What did you come in the day time for?"

"How did I know you was here," said David coolly, "I came to see your mother."

"Of course you knew I was home. You heard it in town," persisted the girl, "but did you hear that Cis was home?"

But this did not seem to be news of great importance to David.

"Is that so?" he said.

"Now go away," said Hulda, "come to supper at half past five. The teacher won't be home till late in the evening, he's gone somewhere in the country. Mother thinks he is trying to get on the County Board."

"Good for Corn," laughed David. "That's business." He then unloaded his pockets into Hulda's apron and vaulted again over the fence.

The last gossip and well-wisher had gone, only in time for Hulda to say a few words to her mother alone, when David appeared.

"Now mother," she had said, "don't say a word to Dave about Cis either for or against her. If he thinks we don't like her, he will take up for her, manlike, you know. We mustn't let him marry her, if we can help it. Let him naturally forget her if he will."

And to all appearances he had forgotten her.

After tea the dishes were washed and put away with the talk and laughter usual when David was around, and the two young people went out to enjoy the fair, warm, moonlight evening in the grassy lane in front of the house yard. For an hour and more they walked back and forth, some passing friend occasionally stopping to speak with them. One way, lay the quiet town, scattered over several low hills; the other way, at the lane's end, was the old brown school house, and seemingly from all around the town came the merry voices of children at play in the moonlight.

Finally Hulda remembered that she was tired and needed a full night's rest. David was going, but he turned back, and made a gesture towards the direction of the Beverly farm. "Did she say anything about me?"

"Who, Dave?"

"Her—Cis."

"Say 'she,' Dave, 'her' is wrong."

"Well, Miss Beverly, then."

"I didn't give her any chance, Dave. I did all the talking. Bring Lila at one to-morrow, as you promised. I must start early. I'd let you ride a ways with me, if it wasn't for that mule of yours."

"Ho!" cried David. "Do you suppose my mule would be seen with that mustang of yours?"

"Say 'yours,'" called Hulda. But David, whistling loudly, was nearly out of sight.

Meanwhile Joseph Cornman had returned, and had sat in the gable window above, apparently writing, but in reality listening to the murmur of the voices in front. On his table lay a bundle of letters from a woman in his native Eastern state, with whom he had corresponded ever since he had come to California. He had been looking over the letters. He knew what the correspondence, although dispassionately conducted, meant to the woman in the East, but he had about concluded to terminate that correspondence.

The years had done a great deal to remove the image of his correspondent from his mind. He knew her to be a cultivated woman. He knew that she wrote stories for domestic papers, but that art or talent left much to be desired in the practical considerations now before his mind.

With a Californian wife, a successful school-teacher, and a favorite in the county, he might the sooner obtain the coveted seat in the County Superintend-

ent's chair. To introduce a stranger to the slow appreciation of these old mining communities, meant delay. The people here liked their own, and they favored their own. The children of the eldest settlers were their wards, besides there was the homestead and some money that Hulda would some time inherit, while Aurelia Hawthorne Stalker had nothing.

So Joseph Cornman was vastly annoyed that David should monopolize all the evening's time of the Cherry Valley school-teacher. But he nervously bided his time. He had so recently come into possession of a definite desire, that he had not acquired a sense of jealousy.

Of Hulda's ready acquiescence in his plan he had no doubt; and after the engagement was arranged he would then speedily put an end to this familiarity with illiterate fellows like Strong.

He had no recognition of the fact that David's planning had made the girl popular in town, and that the good will of the town's people had led him to his present appreciation of the widow's daughter.

Hulda rose early the next morning to have a little while with the roses in the front yard, for after breakfast would be church, and after church, Lila and the road.

She braided her heavy hair in a long, shining braid that hung to her waist, put on a fresh, crisply starched calico dress, and with a pair of scissors in her hand she went about among the tall thick bushes, hanging heavily with roses. A little, yellow, briar rose grew in the corner, and as she turned from a task of tying

it up to the fence, she saw the tall form of the Hardup teacher standing beside her. He had come so silently, and looked so grave, that she felt suddenly unnerved.

"This is an occupation that suits your blooming cheeks, Miss Hardy." Hulda was horrified. The remark coming from him sounded incongruous. Was the man who had taught her so well how to explain cube root, going mad? She allowed a nervous—"O thank you," to escape her lips.

Having delivered himself of this studiously correct compliment, the teacher continued slowly, looking directly at her: "I wish to say a few words to you before your return, Miss Hulda." She muttered a feeble "Yes," and her persecutor smiled at her with satisfaction, as he noted the color deepening on her cheeks. She shrank back against the briar rose-bush in the corner, and waited mutely.

"I think I know of a splendid opening for you, Miss Hardy, one that will suit you very well."

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, really surprised.

"Wouldn't you like a nice position?"

"I suppose so," said the girl.

"They are going to grade this school next term, and have two rooms. They will want a primary teacher. Now if you would like the place as my assistant—"

"But, Oh," cried Hulda, "the people here think I am too young, a mere girl. Besides, the trustees here are against women teachers."

Mr. Cornman hesitated, then placing his cold fin-

gers on her ruddy wrist that embraced her bundle of roses, he said slowly looking solemnly into her face.

"As my wife, you could get it."

The girl's exclamation of surprise was like a stifled scream, and the thorny bush clasped her ankles as she drew away her wrist and let some of her roses fall. She dropped her head, overcome with shame and confusion. Her suitor was then sure of his case.

"Don't you want the place?" he asked softly.

"Oh, sir," said the girl looking down, and not wishing to offend one who had been so really kind to her, "I can't be your wife. I am too young. I never thought of it before."

Mr. Cornman went on with firm and gentle insistence.

"I did not expect you to think of it before. We can arrange it now."

The suffering girl was literally cornered. She must refuse, yet she had not the courage to offend. Her eyes filled with tears of vexation, and her cheeks flamed.

"Ah, this is what I thought—you love me," said the Hardup teacher.

She looked up angry now. "Sir," she cried, "indeed I do not. Please, Mr. Cornman, I can't marry you. Let me go."

But he only smiled strangely, took her arm and led her out into the path.

"I will let you go," he said, "you are excited. You are a little too young, now. But you will change, and change your mind too. Then you will let me know, and we will arrange it."

He went away as silently as he had come, and mounted the stairs to his room, while Hulda stood stupefied in the garden. The muslin curtain at the parlor window moved away. There sat David, making odd gestures at her, his face convulsed with restrained laughter.

He had come in early to beg for breakfast, just in time to witness the little comedy. David had won his bet, and the fun he made of her all the morning helped her to control her genuine distress and vexation.

David went to church with her, a fact that every one in Hardup remembered and made much of afterwards.

Then he brought Lila from the stable and rode her a turn or two around the schoolhouse before Hulda mounted. The girl went galloping swiftly up the long gravelly slope, with a feeling of relief and gladness. The woods, the flowers, and the sweet scented air were better than her perplexing thoughts, and no mountain wind could burn her cheeks, as had the premature proposal of Joseph Cornman. But she was happy now on Lila, and she went rapidly down the mountain side to the trough at the bend in the road with no thought whatever, that Lila was likely to frighten again at the same object.

La Grange had forgotten to caution her in regard to that, and for this reason, he had no difficulty in persuading himself that he ought to go down and see her safely past the dangerous spot. It would be but a seven mile gallop for him, and another runaway

would spoil Lila, and forever intimidate the rider. And so Hulda met him coming up the grade to meet her, and he gave a frank explanation of his reason for coming. The Bird's Flat school-teacher was so accustomed to horseback riding, that it was for him but a simple courtesy. He acknowledged to himself that he came also because he liked to talk to the girl. Miss Hardy was by far the most originally interesting young woman he knew. There were several young ladies in the county who had been to Oakland for seminary educations, who were quite glad to receive attentions from Edward La Grange. But beyond gaining their good will, he had had no time to devote himself to them. Now he was honestly interested in this unsophisticated girl, whom he hoped would become one of the best teachers in the county, in which he desired to have a strong political footing, so practically did he look forward to his future years.

He had even put in motion a chain of events, that had caused the Cherry Valley trustees to hear favorably of Miss Hardy. As the two proceeded down the grade Hulda's tired face grew bright. It seemed so natural and appropriate that he should be there. She forgot her cares and grew happy under his gentle and skillful, though rather domineering influence. She told him all about her little school, and about the Dorms family, who were to enter with a bad reputation for restraint of any kind, and a trained antipathy for all the rest of the children.

La Grange laughed heartily, and gave her some good advice. He also said he would come over on

the first leisure Saturday, and help her over any little perplexity that might be present.

They walked their horses up the grade, and through the thick bushes on the long divide. Once they stopped, and La Grange sprang from his horse to gather her a handful of Mariposa lilies. They were in sight of Cherry Valley, when he drew rein and said he would go back.

"You will be home by sunset," he said. "Give Lila the rein and let her go. Go to bed early and rest. I think you must have had a busy vacation; any way, you have had two hard rides."

He dismounted and came and stood beside her while he took her hand in parting. Then he lifted his hat courteously while she smiled her goodby and thanks. Lila shook her head free and bounded away, more anxious to be home than her weary rider was to leave such a pleasant loitering among the long shadows of the forest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "BATESES AND THE DORMSES."

"The Dormses is comin' to-day. The shirts is done," cried Alex at the breakfast-table, Monday morning. The teacher became aware of it when she arrived at the schoolhouse on old Block, with the youngest Woods behind her. The Dorms family were arrayed in a silent row in the shade by the side of the school building, their tin lunch-pails and books in an orderly arrangement on the ground. Buck Dorms, nearly six feet in height, and two small boys, wore new blue overalls, and bright blue gingham shirts, and three pairs of new pink suspenders held up the essentials of the masculine Dormses.

The two girls wore pink calico dresses, and sun-bonnets of the same material.

Buck Dorms leaned against the side of the house, and looked silently and stolidly away to the west.

The young teacher put away her things and went to speak to them. She succeeded in getting Buck to give her his hand to shake, but the smaller boys dropped their heads and nervously twisted their bare toes in the sand. She peeked into the pink sunbonnets, and saw two dark little faces with bright black eyes, but the whole family seemed to be mute. As

Hulda moved away in despair, one of the girls pulled her dress.

"Teacher," she said, "Pap sent word for you not to have us sit with any of the Bateses."

The teacher smiled a gracious assent to these directions, and the five Dormses brightened up at once, and reached for their pails and books to be ready to enter the house.

Hulda gave her entire attention to seating the Dorms family, where there would be the least danger of hostilities.

Buck was given a seat by himself in the back of the room on the left, the width of the house between him and Millie Bates, who occupied the corresponding seat on the other side. The two smaller boys were by themselves, and the little pink girls were under the teacher's eye in front, with not a Bates in sight of them.

The oldest Dorms had but two books, an arithmetic and a manual of book-keeping. He announced that they were all he wished to study. His father, it seems, had decided that he should not waste his time on grammar, and other trifling studies designed especially for girls. Hulda, however, after some days of adroit managing, succeeded in persuading him to read an American history and to copy and read a little from the readers and geographies. He said he was too big to recite, but Hulda found that he really acquired a great deal of information in his own way from the books she placed in his hands.

Millie Bates was also an unclassified pupil but it

was even more difficult to find out what she was learning than to sound the stolid Dorms.

Millie was perfectly willing and obedient, and never refused to attempt to study or recite. But the semblance of study seemed to be her best achievement. She was never impatient and smiled sweetly over all her failures. She advanced steadily page by page, and covered all the ground, but what she really remembered her gentle teacher never knew. But she did know that Millie appreciated and loved her.

Mrs. Bates had a local fame as cook, and Millie, having an aptitude also in that direction, had acquired considerable proficiency in this domestic art and, every Monday morning she would bring her teacher a slice of some delicious cake; the best testimonial she was able to offer, as an acknowledgment of her appreciation.

Millie had large blue eyes and pink cheeks. She combed her light hair in handsome coils, and as girls were classified in those parts, she was esteemed rather pretty.

For the first week there seemed to be no sign of trouble between the Dorms and Bates factions. Quiet reigned. On the second Monday the Dorms family again came into prominence by appearing in new colors. The boys wore pink shirts this time, and the girls blue dresses and sunbonnets.

Soon after the morning session opened Buck Dorms dropped his book upon the desk with a loud bang, reached for his hat and suddenly left the room. His watchful teacher followed him to the porch with an expression of simple curiosity on her face.

"Why, what's the matter, Buck? Is there anything wrong?"

The young man turned his dark, angry face toward her.

"You bet I'll go home if Millie don't stop laffin' at me."

Hulda smiled, yet she had no comprehension of the real reason of this seemingly hostile remark.

"I don't think she is laughing at you, Buck," she said. "But I will see. She must not do it. Wait, and I will speak to her."

Buck obediently sat down on the porch and waited. Millie's face was in her apron, and she was laughing hysterically and refused to speak. But bright little Alex held up his hand.

"Please, Miss Hardy, she's laffin' at Buck. His hands gets pink off'm his shirt."

Hulda gently reproved her young lady pupil, and the laughter was changed into an equally unrestrained shower of tears.

Buck, watching from the door, was then apparently mollified, and returned to his seat.

A day or so after, at the noon day recess, one of the small Bates boys came in crying. "Buck Dorms threw a rock at me," he whimpered.

Hulda went out to reason with Buck, but he positively denied having thrown a rock at the boy. The teacher spent the hour smoothing over the difficulty. The week then passed away without further hostilities. The younger children became used to each other and began to associate amicably on the playground. Buck

and Millie, however, seemed to take every favorable opportunity to publish their antipathy.

Millie said several times, in a loud voice, that Buck did throw the rock, and Buck retaliated by flinging a pebble in Millie's direction, whenever she appeared in his sight on the playground.

The young teacher observed this with forebodings. She knew that a quarrel at school would be extended to the families at home, and might result in the withdrawal of nearly all of her pupils.

One day Millie came in at recess and dropped into her seat sobbing. Hulda hurried sympathetically to her side, and after some coaxing found that one of Buck's pebbles had hit her upon the side of the face. There was no mark on the round, firm, apple-cheek, and why the girl's heart should be so utterly crushed by so slight an injury, or affront, was incomprehensible to the serious-minded teacher. But she tried to comfort her, then went out to see if she could not reason Buck into some terms of peace.

Buck had been stealing information through the window, and was evidently pleased to see Millie in a condition of such abject sorrow. He listened to all his teacher had to say, with quiet good-nature. He whittled a stick vigorously and seemed to enjoy Hulda's long dissertation on charity and the forgiveness of offenses.

"All right," he said, finally, "tell her I won't do it again, if she'll just stop laffin' at me." Here was another mystery, for Hulda knew it to be incompatible with Millie's simple nature to really attempt to

ridicule any one. However, quiet and peace succeeded; but the young teacher's mind was in continual anxiety lest hostilities should at any moment be resumed.

She became so worried and perplexed thinking it all over, that upon the next Saturday, she cast it all from her memory and rested her mind by devoting the day to her studies. Latin-English translation was always to her an absorbing recreation. Then she spent an hour with her favorite poem, *Aurora Leigh*. With the limited experiences of her young life, she could not understand all of it, but she had a liking for its seriousness. Her own blundering hands had been led to take hold of strange yet manifest duties, and she found comfort in *Aurora's* nobility. Life seemed easier and sweeter after reading of her.

Before lunch she laid down her books and put on a new white dress her mother had made and sent her. It was more elaborately made than her old ones, with open sleeves showing her round, white arms. She had become more clever in arranging her hair, having caught a trick of Millie Bates, and she brushed it into shining coils and drew it into a shapely and modish design. Then she pinned on her breast a great bunch of her favorite poppies (*Eschscholtzias*), that Alex and Trummy had brought her that morning. She then turned to her glass with a reflective glance. She had suddenly wondered if she could ever be so good looking as to be loved, like a heroine in a book. She was startled at the vision

she saw there. Certainly her eyes had never looked so dark and glowing as now, over the mass of golden poppies. A new expression was growing around her mouth, and there seemed to be a more delicate outline in the paler pink of her cheeks. And she blushed to have caught a smile hovering on her lips. Shaking out her soft white skirt, she went out into the porch, sheltered by blooming honey-suckles, and there waited for the call to lunch. She suddenly heard the loud voice of Mr. Woods saying to some one around the corner of the house:

"Yes, you can raise any kind of fruit here, but what are you going to do for a market?"

"Well, the market will come, I think," answered a well-modulated voice, the sound of which caused the girl's heart to leap, and the blood to tingle a moment in her cheeks.

Just then the two men came around the corner of the house toward her—Mr. Woods and Edward La Grange—each carrying a market basket full of ripe cherries. La Grange placed his basket quickly on the porch and came toward Hulda, who had held out her warm hand.

"How do you do, Miss Hardy?" he said. "I have been scraping up an acquaintance with Mr. Wood on the strength of having met you. So please don't repudiate me now."

The surprised girl murmured almost inaudibly, "Oh, no, why should I?" while he held her hand firmly, Mr. Woods having turned away to wipe his heated face.

Then Hulda quickly brought some chairs, and La Grange sat down, watching her with a pleased and puzzled expression. He had never before noticed that she possessed so many of the elements of beauty. Mr. Woods turned to them with a smiling look.

"Well, I had the advantage on scraping acquaintances, for he finished the last of my cherries."

La Grange laughed, threw off his white straw hat, and lifting a basket of cherries, placed it within reach of Hulda. No one could help but feel at home with La Grange. Both felt the charm of his perfect self-possession and ease. Hulda recovered from her embarrassment.

"What! Picking cherries instead of breaking horses?"

"Oh, anything!" laughed the young man.

Then Mr. Woods explained that La Grange had been up in his large cherry trees all the morning, and had finished the cherry picking. Then Hulda remembered that the little boys had gone up the creek to fish, or rather to play at fishing, which accounted for the silence, and the fact that she did not know before of his presence.

Not that La Grange thought this the only means of obtaining the favor of Mr. Woods, but as he rode up he observed that Mr. Woods was having some difficulty working with a short ladder and large trees, and having yet a boy's love of the sport, he had offered to assist. That his political prospects might be improved by his ability to pick cherries, was an afterthought.

Although the attractions of the Cherry Valley school-teacher had brought him there, yet, viewing it politically, he knew that his time in the cherry trees had been better employed than in conversing with the brown-eyed young teacher.

But Mrs. Woods had seen the stranger in the trees and had made herself busy preparing a savory and attractive luncheon. She soon appeared on the porch, and welcomed La Grange with pleasure in her voice and manners; for the presence of so agreeable a person was another break in the monotony of her life. She took them all in to lunch, supplying a flow of apt and pleasing remarks.

Hulda felt a new sense of companionship with her young friend, as she noted the familiar footing he adopted among these plain-mannered, yet intelligent people.

The days were now growing longer and warmer, and La Grange was very content that afternoon to sit on the shaded porch, perfumed with honey-suckles, and study the character and opinions of this attractive and shy young woman. He was amused with her recital of her difficulties at school; he knew that they would not seem so grave to him. He could not for himself understand why two young people at that age should perpetuate the family feud in a really serious manner. He thought a little managing of some sort might bring the young people together into more amicable relationship. The family troubles ought to be eliminated among the children for the sake, any way, of the school and its interests. He then told Hulda

of a project he had for the amusement of the people, and he thought that, possibly, through it, the hostile children might be drawn into peaceful relations. He wished her to unite with him in giving a school picnic on the Fourth of July. He said that there was a very nice grove of oaks about half way between the two districts. He thought that with the two schools a good program might be arranged; a platform, he said, would be erected by the young men of his district, provided they could have a dance. Hulda dropped her eyes, clasping her hands silently. The picnic would be delightful; but she was thinking about the dance. She had been taught to disapprove of anything of that kind, and La Grange knew it. He left his chair and came and sat down on the edge of the porch at her feet.

"I know you're troubled," he said, "about the dance, but believe me there is no use to have a picnic without it. No one would come. We can have the exercise before lunch, and then if you are so much troubled about the dance, you could—"

Hulda interrupted; "Come home."

La Grange laughed and picked up a poppy that had fallen from her throat.

"Yes, you could." La Grange was not playing lover, he was dispatching business; and she liked his way of doing it. Hulda decided not to oppose the dance. Since she had first met La Grange, David had given her some practical training in the art of mingling agreeably with all sorts of people. At that time and place there was so selection—society was cosmopolitan or nothing.

"I will not treat your picnic that way," she said. "I will stay and talk to the pople."

He looked up into her face with a grateful expression of understanding. "You are right," he continued, "and if you will come over on Lila, I would be pleased to ride home with you after the picnic. It will be on Friday. Now let us arrange about that program."

He was glad that he did not have to argue again with this proud girl on the subject of dancing, which he cared for only as a means of associating with the people.

The sun was low when the arrangements were quite finished, and he arose from his low seat so close to the folds of her white dress.

"Now, good-by," his manner was always so patronly, "I will be over on Saturday, sure. Two weeks is a short time for us to get ready in, but I think we will get on nicely."

After he had gone Hulda was telling Mrs. Woods of the plans they had made for the exercises, and she was surprised upon reflection, that she had consented to these arrangements; for she was now doubtful that they could be successfully carried out. Her children had never participated in anything of the kind.

Among other things the plan was to have all the children march several times around the platform singing "Hail Columbia," with Millie Bates and Buck Dorms at the head, severally costumed as Columbia and Brother Jonathan.

"You will do well if you make them do it," commented Mrs. Woods, "but if you could, the two families would be so proud, they might quit quarreling for a while."

So Hulda determined to carry out the plan if possible.

Millie had a well developed, Minerva like form, and Buck was tall and awkward; both well designed for presentaton of these characters.

Hulda thought it best to first introduce the subject to Buck; so on the Monday following she went out to the oak tree where he was whittling in the shade, and candidly told him of the plans for the picnic, and what they wanted him to do. To her surprise he offered no objection.

"I know La Grange," he said, "he is a good fellow. I'll do it to please him or you either; if Millie will," he added.

Hulda found that her real task was with Millie. When the plan was explained at Millie's desk at the recess, Millie, blushing, dropped her head on her arms and giggled so much and so long that it was impossible to get a definite answer from her that day.

The next day she assured the teacher with great emphasis, that she wouldn't do it for anything in the world, she knew she wouldn't. She was sure her mother wouldn't allow it, either.

Hulda gently reminded her that she was the only girl in the two districts, who had a perfectly classic form, and therefore the only one suitable for the part. On the third day Millie came and blushingly said,

that she was willing to appear as Columbia, if Buck would come and ask her himself. Again the teacher stated the case to the eldest of the Dorms family. Buck received the information in silence, whittling as usual.

"All right," he said finally, "I'll see what I'll do."

At noon time Hulda saw the two counselling together under the oak tree, and then Millie came to her, all smiles, and said she had consented. Hulda was relieved, especially as there seemed to be no more quarreling, and "Columbia" and "Brother Jonathan" consulted continuously under the oak tree.

Saturday La Grange came again and all the arrangements were perfected. La Grange assumed the responsibility and care of the preparation of "Brother Jonathan," leaving Millie's costume to the devices of Mrs. Woods and Hulda.

The teachers had much to talk about that warm June day; and when La Grange started home Hulda put on a wide hat and walked with him a ways following the shadows on the creek road. The picnic had placed them on a more social basis. They chatted and laughed freely and told each other their later school-room experiences. The young woman was receiving confidence and courage from the wiser young man. He seemed not to know any difficulties, and he was so earnest, and faced hard work so unflinchingly. She wondered; and became more ambitious and broader in mind.

Even on that day he had carried a Virgil's *Æneid* in his pocket, reviewing its hard lines as he rode through the shady groves, and over stony ridges.

They stood with a lingering hand clasp when the setting of the sun warned him that he must hasten on.

"I think it will all be a success only for one thing," he said, looking steadily down upon her, "that is, you will not dance with me."

The warm color flooded her face. She wished that she need not offend him for so slight a thing. Besides she really wanted to dance, and to dance with him. Millie had been teaching her the steps, and with the knowledge came temptation. She compressed her lips and looked down.

"Only for my mother," she stammered.

"There," he said, "I'll not tease you. I wish I had a mother to honor. Good-night, now. I'll not see you till the Fourth."

He leaped into his saddle and was off. She turned back, listening to the ring of his horse's feet on the hard, graded road. Life seemed so newly precious and rich, and all effort so natural and sweet. She thought no place in all the world could be as fair as that warm red hill, the brushy creek, the irregular orchard, and the low, brown farmhouse.

During the week following, Millie had several tearful afternoons, but the anxious teacher could not determine the cause. Buck, however, assured her, that Millie wouldn't go back on what she had agreed to do, and Thursday night came and all was ready for the first picnic of the Cherry Creek and Bird's Flat School Districts, the events and consequences of which were destined to work a radical change in the lives of several of the participants.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PICNIC.

It was in the line of natural events that David Strong, over in Hardup, should hear of the picnic. He immediately had a great desire to see his friend Hulda Hardy surrounded by her pupils and her new friends. A few thoughts about it led him to the conclusion that he ought to get a neat buggy and take Mrs. Hardy to that picnic, for he knew that the good woman seldom went away from home, and it would be a rare pleasure to her, as well as the novelty of attending an affair in which her daughter was directly concerned.

It would also be a chance for him to show that he appreciated the many home privileges he had enjoyed at the Hardy cottage.

Going to the livery stable in town to hire a buggy, he found that he could get nothing but a two seated carriage. As he stood in a quandary looking at it, a new idea occurred to him.

He whistled softly, engaged the carriage and two horses, and then strode out in the direction of the widow's home.

He found Mrs. Hardy in her kitchen. She was willing and glad to go, although she would have to

sit up late that night to prepare the lunch, and also be burdened on the trip with the care of the child, Nonie.

Then David went out, enjoying fully the process of carrying out his plan.

Mr. Jospeh Cornman was sitting on the front porch in the moonlight. No, he had not heard of the picnic. He hoped it would pass off satisfactorily, and not cause Hulda any trouble, as such things usually did. He was very glad Mrs. Hardy was going, very glad.

"You'd better come along too," suggested David, carelessly, as if he had not been planning towards that particular end. "There's plenty of room—two horse rig—more the merrier—glad to have you."

Mr. Cornman's face relaxed, but he was careful to restrain a smile. He succeeded very well in avoiding a too eager acceptance of the offer. He finally stated that if he would not be at all in the way, he would go to occupy the vacant seat.

All this was great fun for David. His plan was to take the Hardup teacher to the picnic to exasperate Hulda all day with the situations he would bring about, and then mollify her afterwards with his good-humor. It was choice amusement for him. It was worth the eight dollars for the team.

So he left the cottage chuckling over the progress of his arrangements. Then as he whistled along, another after-thought came with seductive power. He threw up his hand and stopped. There was still a vacant seat in the carriage. There was another

one who might want to go for love of Hulda, of whom Hulda had spoken kindly the Sunday that she was home. It was one who had treated him badly—so badly that his good sense had come to his rescue. Yet she was at home now, loved Hulda, and Hulda had spoken kindly of her. Now was a good time to show the world he didn't care, any way.

David consulted his watch; it was yet early, so he turned about and walked across the schoolhouse flat, along the stony creek bottom and up to the little brown, vine-covered house on the Beverly farm.

The old people showed their happiness at once, to see him come again. Grandmother bustled around, and lit the lamp in the house to call them in from the moonlit porch. Then she brought milk and cake from the pantry. Grandpa brought in a pan of fragrant apricots, while Cis shrank into a large rocker and watched David, with a white, thoughtful face. She had suffered much in her short life, but not through one like David.

When the picnic was spoken of the color warmed in her face, and later she followed him all the way down the orchard path to the gate, and spoke of the pleasure it would be to her to go, and her appreciation of his thoughtfulness.

About the middle of the forenoon on the day of the picnic, Hulda stood with La Grange on the odorous new pine platform, arranging with him just how the schools should come up onto the platform, when they sang the opening ode together. She wore her new, soft, white dress, a pretty fresh straw hat,

and a flutter of yellow ribbons around her neck and waist; the mass of yellow poppies in her hand had been handed up to her by some of her pupils just as she had stepped onto the platform.

The Fourth of July is seldom anything but cloudless in the lower Sierra regions, but a light breeze was blowing and the day was considered perfect.

The grove was filling with a miscellaneous crowd of people, and vehicles of all sorts hitched under the trees formed a complete circle around.

The majority were plainly dressed people, with faces indicating all sorts of mental and moral grades, and their garments all sorts of styles. There was a sprinkling of persons dressed according to the later modes, prevalent in the cities; and some very correct and gallant looking beaus were escorting some stylishly dressed young ladies around the grounds.

Miss Hunter of Enterprise Mine was telling her intimate friend that she thought the Cherry Valley school-marm was a stumpy looking thing, and Miss Weaver, daughter of the leading trustee of Bird's Flat, remarked to her rather rotund mother that there was Edward up there talking with that Miss Hardy, and she hoped they would get through fixing things up some time.

In truth they had been all the morning "fixing things."

They had borrowed the use of rooms in the adjacent farmhouse to try on the costumes of Brother Jonathan and the Goddess of Liberty. They had compared results and had dismissed the two children,

for so they considered them, to divert themselves till the second dressing time came.

Millie was full of extra giggle, and Buck noncommunicative; and Hulda started them off together, pleased that they seemed to be on friendly footing. While she was standing on the platform talking to La Grange, she lifted her eyes to an opening in the grove, and a cry of surprise escaped her. A handsome carriage drawn by a dashing team had just come up, and that was David who sprang to the ground with the reins; but who were the other people? Would La Grange excuse her for a few minutes?

The young man escorted her to the steps of the platform and handed her down gracefully.

"Don't forget Miss Liberty," he said, smiling.

Hulda pushed her way through the crowd and threw her arms around her mother, just as David lifted her to the ground.

"And Mr. Cornman, too! Oh, how surprised I am!" she cried. "Well, I am delighted!" She gave a hand to each.

Cis in a black dress and a little white hat, had been arranging the sleeping baby in the carriage robes. Mrs. Hardy drew Hulda aside.

"We didn't know she was coming," she explained, "till David brought her this mornnig. But she has been kind; she has carried the baby all the way for me."

David wore a fine black suit, was clean shaven below his mustache, and Hulda complimented him on his appearance. He had found an excuse to draw

her aside, by showing her his horses. There was something he wanted to say, and when safe from the hearing of all the others, he began his humorous nonsense.

"You see, Cornman couldn't stand it any longer," he said. "He's heard all about your fine new beau over here, and the poor man's nearly crazy. I think he wants to kill that Bird's Flat teacher. Got his pocket full of self-loading crayons. Just see the team he hired, Hulda. How's that for style?"

Having heard enough of that, Hulda went back to the others. Whatever the little embarrassment might be, she was glad to have them there. They were her own folks, and Mr. Cornman was somewhat known and commanded respect any where. She was trying to seat them all near the platform, when La Grange touched her arm.

"You will have to come," he said, "I'm afraid there is trouble. Buck wants to see you."

She found Buck under an oak tree back of the platform. He wanted to tell her that he wouldn't march around with Millie Bates, and make her a little speech and persent her with a garland; that he couldn't, and wouldn't do it, for all the money in the world. He simply would not, and she'd have to find some one else.

The young teacher was vexed and distressed, but she knew better than to be angry with Buck. She gave him her sympathy; something surely had gone wrong with him. She knew that Buck was simple-hearted and meant no unkindness, though she failed

utterly to understand his varying moods. So she spoke only kindly and regretfully, and soon the true reason came out. Millie had again punished his sensitive nature by an unexplained lapse of sobriety.

Hulda sighed. Millie was not really capable of making fun of any one, and the cause of Buck's many misunderstandings of her moods or remarks was incomprehensible to her. But she took his arm and led him aside. He was tall and well dressed, and made a desirable escort, as escorts were rated there.

"I know you must be wrong," she said. "Millie doesn't make fun of you. If she has I will make her apologize. Would that make it all right, if I brought her and made her apologize?"

The young man's face brightened.

"Will you wait till I bring her here?"

He nodded and produced a stick to whittle.

Then the anxious teacher had a futile hunt around the grounds to find her Miss Columbia. La Grange suggested the farmhouse, and there she found her in the parlor alone in an attitude the Goddess of Liberty had never been known to assume, and shedding tears in a highly perfumed handkerchief. Hulda had already made up her mind to humble herself to any amount of coaxing, so she put her arm lovingly around her prostrate model for a Goddess.

"You poor little girl," she said, "what is the matter. Tell me, Millie dear, won't you?"

Millie dropped her fair head on her teacher's shoulder and sobbed.

"Buck is dreadful angry."

"But, Millie, my child, you must not make fun of him."

"I didn't," indignantly.

"Millie!" reprovingly.

"Well, I didn't."

"But he thinks you did, dear, and you must go and apologize, for it is nearly time to begin the exercises."

"Won't he march, if I don't?" with a flush of blushes.

"No, Millie, and I don't blame him. Come dear."

Millie took from her pocket a bit of powder in an envelope, and her willing teacher brushed away the traces of her tears, and they went down together to the spot where Buck was still whittling, with averted face.

"Buck," said the gentle teacher, "here's Millie. She's sorry if she has offended you, and wishes to apologize. Come, do settle your trouble and get ready for the march."

Buck lookèd up at her gratefully.

"All right," he said. "You go on up, and we will be there in a minute."

Hulda left them and waited on the farmhouse porch. They came up more like pair of lovers than school-children. Millie hanging on his arm contentedly, and Buck looking proud and self satisfied. La Grange followed them, and Hulda saw a curious smile hovering on his face as he looked at her over their shoulders. It flashed across her mind that La Grange saw more in their rustic reconciliation than

the circumstance warranted, but she had no time to think it over.

Shortly after, the two schools in couples began to march around on the platform singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," after which, a tall Brother Jonathan, resplendent in a striped and starry costume led a beautiful and dignified Columbia to the front, and the rest thronged about singing "Hail Columbia," and waving their flags with appropriate time and gestures.

Buck presented the placid Columbia with a garland of green bays and roses, as a symbol of the country's devotion; and repeated his lines, omitting part of them, however. The audience broke into the wildest applause; it made no difference what he said or omitted, they were delighted with the spectacle.

La Grange then took charge of the platform and program, adroitly giving the Cherry Valley school teacher a prominent seat as Maid of Honor to the fair Columbia. The program of songs and recitations was then delivered, and the audience listened with wonder and amazement, for no teachers in those parts had ever before presented such a literary and artistic entertainment. Indeed La Grange had made the best of his material.

Alex Woods was a shining success "Standing on the burning deck" as Cassabianca.

A wild looking girl with a tangle of black hair, who had been to the city for a year, made a successful "Charge of the Light Brigade," and the leading young lady pupil from Bird's Flat made "The Bells" ring

and swing as they never had rung and swung before.

Then the leading boy pupil of Bird's Flat came on with a speech from Webster that made a profound impression.

A young lady from Bird's Flat, not in the school, but at the desire of La Grange, rendered "The Star Spangled Banner," chorused by all in the audience or the schools who would sing.

The exercises terminated in a burst of long continued applause, and the audience and children then scattered about among the oaks to discuss its merits over the lunches, that were soon spread on white tablecloths over the grass.

Hulda immediately hurried to help her mother with the luncheon for their little party.

Mr. Cornman was moderately enthusiastic in his praise of the entertainment, and David amused himself by making laudatory statements about La Grange, and continually asking Hulda to verify the truth of them.

How fond the people were of him! What a good voice he had! What easy manners! And didn't Hulda think so, in every case?

Cis tried to come to her rescue, and protested gently.

"Please don't, Dave. Any one would think you were making fun of him." Hulda pressed her hand, and David looked up at Cis reflectively.

After the remnants and the dishes had been repacked by the two girls, Cis and David suddenly walked away together, and the Hardup teacher, in-

cidentally or intentionally, walked out of hearing, so that Hulda and her mother had an opportunity to talk a few moments confidentially. They were disturbed by the harsh sound of the tuning of a violin. They looked down and saw that the people were hurrying to the platform with all the evidence of pleasurable excitement. Hulda saw the dark head of La Grange, as he stood with several other young men, who were tuning stringed instruments. A girl gayly dressed, holding a guitar, stood smiling down at the upturned faces about her. Hulda saw at a glance that the real motive of the day as it concerned most of the crowd, was about to have culmination. Young men were hurrying here and there, and the young women were smiling and talking with new animation, wherever they happened to be.

The violinists finally seated themselves on a corner of the platform, and a stout man sprang up by the players, and opened the affair by calling out in a loud voice:

“Take your partners for a quadrille.”

Immediately a press of oddly assorted couples filled up the platform; stiff old men with stout wives, tall men with little girls, boys with old maids, and the belle of Bird's Flat with her father. She had taken care, however, to secure a standing place near La Grange, to whom she addressed her remarks while she waited.

Miss Weaver and Miss Hunter were with the handsomest young men on the grounds. While perfectly at ease, and apparently happy, Millie and Buck

walked arm in arm to a corner position. Then the music and calling of figures began, and with a mingling of graceful and grotesque bows, the platform began to sound and shake with the tramp of many feet.

Mrs. Hardy was mildly distressed that there should have been dancing at her daughter's picnic, and she was not interested in it, even as a picture of the people's amusement; so Hulda arranged her on the carriage seats and robes so that she might rest, and care for Nonie, and went and found Mrs. Woods to come and sit with her.

This accomplished she went down to a plank seat near the platform, for she was particularly interested in the dancing of Buck and Millie. She was immediately surrounded by several of her young school-children, who leaned upon her and clung to her hands. Then Mr. Cornman came gravely and sat down beside her. She was glad of the protective presence of the little ones. Deprived of the chance to make any personal plea, he began to question her in a parental way about her school. She followed him with her replies, and managed an intelligent conversation, but her mind was concentrated on the curious scene before her: The odd coupling of old and young, the new lumber platform, redolent of the odors of the mill, and the background of great shady oaks.

The transformation of Millie and Buck was deeply interesting; no longer slow, awkward school-children, but a graceful young man and woman, the handsomest couple under her observation. Whatever their cul-

ture in other things may have lacked, they showed no lack of it here. They were in the world they were best fitted to occupy. They danced with grace both forgetting in the inspiration of the violins that they had ever suffered from restraint and awkwardness. Despite the Methodistical training of the young observer, a feeling of real pleasure came into her heart, that here was an occupation in which these young people were the peers of all around them. In watching them so closely, Hulda was unconsciously memorizing the sequence of the simple figures, when suddenly the music changed to a waltz tune, Buck's arm went around Millie's waist, and they glided around and were lost in the whirlpool of the crowd. La Grange, meanwhile, was smiling at Hulda over his violin, and discerning something of her thought, as her dark eyes dwelt admiringly on the forms of her pupils. She caught the glance of his magnetic eye, and she turned to Mr. Cornman, ashamed of her inattention to him. She read the meaning of the glance and flushed guiltily. She was guilty of admiring that of which she did not approve. La Grange would think her lacking in strength of mind. When she again turned to the platform, David and Cis were there in the corner, in the place of Buck and Millie. This did not attract her so much, and she was about to go back to her mother, when a light touch on her arm from behind stopped her. It was Buck, no longer her pupil, but one of the leaders of Cherry Valley society.

"Teacher, don't you want to dance?"

"Dance!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, with me."

Hulda heard a sound, neither a laugh or a groan, from Mr. Cornman, so she hastily took Buck's arm and moved away, saying to him as she walked, "Why Buck, you know I can't dance. What do you come to me for?"

"Oh, you don't have to know," persisted Buck. "That don't make no difference. You can dance a quadrille any way. I'll teach you."

Hulda then stopped and faced him with the authority of her official right.

"Tell me, Buck, did Mr. La Grange send you to me?"

"Oh, no, Miss Hardy," he replied earnestly. "It was his place to dance with you first, but I suppose he couldn't get any one to play in his place. I just thought I'd come and get you."

Hulda hesitated. She dreaded the necessity of giving offense to her pupil, who could never understand her reasons. Then the idea of an agreeable compromise came to her.

"Well, I appreciate your kindness, Buck, and though I can't dance, I'll go up and march around with you. It will please the children to see me up there."

"All right," answered the young man, with great satisfaction. "Come on. They're going to march now."

Although Hulda went reluctantly, she soon found herself enjoying the sensation of marching around

to the strains of lively music; Buck's pride was manifest, and many turned to her with smiles of welcome. All at once things began to change. There were swift movements all around her and the call:

"Balance all. First couples right and left," found her in the center of the platform with David and Cis in front of her, couples swinging at the right and left, and no way of escape.

"Buck," she pleaded, with a horrified look, "can't you get me out?"

"Oh, no," he returned, coolly, "you're all right. Strong and I will help you through. I know Strong. Seen him lots of times." He held her arm firmly. "No, you can't get out. Watch Strong's girl, and you're all right."

"Swing your partners!"

Buck swung her around with perfect skill. Cis came forward with a smile, and took her hand, and David swung her again, apparently, however, not knowing who she was. The three assistants skillfully pushed her through the figure, and as soon as she had recovered her self-possession, she said to Strong:

"Dave, this is one of your tricks." David only laughed.

"Buck," she said, on the other side of the figure, "did Mr. Strong send you for me?"

"Well, yes," admitted her big boy pupil, "but I wanted to go for you anyway. All the folks will like you better if you dance."

When the opportunity came the four made their way out. Buck bowed, thanked her for her company

and went away. Hulda walked up to the carriage with David and Cis, having taken a distressing lesson in the manners and customs of the country.

David was hilarious—full of the wildest mirth, and enlarged upon all the mirthful powers of the incident. Her mother had a grave face, but Mrs. Woods, Cis, and even Mr. Cornman, fell into the spirit of the joke, and met her excuses and regrets with wit and laughter.

David gravely explained to Mr. Cornman that Hulda was about to marry the son of the leading sheep man of that section, and Cis was laughingly sure that Hulda must have taken dancing lessons; and Mrs. Woods and Mr. Cornman fell into a serious discussion on the general subject of dancing. Then when they had all quieted down, sitting around in a careless group in the shade, Hulda surprised them all by explaining that her views had received a little adjusting and that she could see no harm in orderly dancing in the open air, among people who would be at a loss for some other amusement.

When the crowd had fairly dispersed, La Grange sent his violin home in a farm wagon, mounted his horse and galloped off down the ravine where Hulda was slowly disappearing in the distance on Lila. The day had been of all work to him and no pleasure, and he looked forward to a restful ride and a quiet evening in the Woods farmhouse, with the only girl he knew just then, whose company was really worth the time.

La Grange, yet true to himself, took no pleasure

in any affair, only as it was subservient to his own interests. He would have regretted the time spent at the picnic, but that he counted it so much gain towards his acquaintanceship and popularity in the county. His law books were dearer to him than any dance, and at that moment he carried in his pocket a little French grammar, intending to ask the Cherry Valley teacher to engage with him in the study of that language. When he overtook her, and she turned to him with a softening of her dark eyes, he passed the book to her, and spoke of his plan.

"That would be delightful," she exclaimed, her face full of meaning. "Let us begin this evening."

"Yes, we will begin," said La Grange, with a serious glance and manner, "when you have explained to me why you have so suddenly reversed your principles in favor of a handsomer partner than I. I believe you refused to dance with me under any conditions whatsoever."

A vivid flush crept over the girl's cheeks, and she turned her face away. It was a serious matter to her if he cared. She did not see the smile of amusement that crossed his face. Meanwhile it was nothing to him; he was pleased that she had had the political good judgment to place herself on such a generous basis with the country people, but he did enjoy bringing the color to the cheek of such an innocent and good meaning girl.

The horses slowed into a walk, and Hulda turned her head as they rode into the shade of a steep hill, the sun setting over its crest. The buckeyes, man-

zanitas and madroñes made a narrow avenue, and a flock of quail whirred on before them.

"But, will you not allow me to explain, Mr. La Grange?"

He tried to continue his seriousness, but failed.

"I don't see what explanation you can make, Miss Hardy. You chose another before me. That is about the size of it."

Hulda lifted her eyes and smiled.

"But you are unfair," she said, "let me give my evidence and then pass your judgment."

Then as she explained, he persisted in asking so many puzzling questions, and making such droll remarks, that the ponies took their own time, and it was nearly dark when they rode up to the Woods farmhouse and found Mrs. Woods at the orchard gate looking for Hulda, anxious that she should be home in time for tea.

The Woods' home, whenever occasion offered, was always open as a public house, and La Grange explained that he wished to study with the Cherry Valley teacher, at once engaged accommodations of her for the night for himself and horse. This frankness of purpose was usual with him.

After tea, Mrs. Woods drew out a table for them, and the French lessons began, the class being enlarged by Alex, who leaned upon his teacher's lap under the kindly embrace of her arm.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LINE FENCE.

As they all sat at breakfast in the morning in the little dining-room, Alex, whose quick ears caught every sound, left the table and ran out. He soon ran back breathless, with wide open eyes.

"Susie Bates 's out here on the gray mare," he cried, "and she says Millie must be here. She didn't come home last night at all."

Hulda could see nothing alarming in that, but as Mrs. Woods rose immediately and went out, she followed.

Perched oddly on the back of the large mare was little Susie, sobbing and shedding tears. She wanted her Millie. Millie slept with her. Millie had never been away before, and altogether her heart was broken for Millie.

The two women tried to comfort the little girl as best they could, and were sending her away, when a spring wagon appeared, containing Mrs. Bates and the eldest boy, and it soon transpired that the entire Bates family were out scouring the neighborhood for Millie. No trace of her had been found. Then Mr. Bates came dashing up on a great black horse, throwing the dust and charging the air with wild vitupera-

tions. La Grange, with the balance of the Woods family, came out and stood around the spring wagon.

"Has any one been around to the Dorms' ranch?" asked La Grange.

"Oh, she wouldn't be there," exclaimed Mrs. Bates, a mild, blue-eyed woman, with an expression of deep anxiety; and all who were present knew that none of the Bates family would be apt to inquire at that farm.

"Suppose, however," continued La Grange, with earnest interest, "that I saddle my horse and go over there and inquire for her. Some of them may have seen her."

This awakened the wits of Alex, whose information on all subjects coming under his observation was truly remarkable.

"I bet she ain't there," he cried, triumphantly. "I bet she and Buck's eloped. I seen him kiss her at school, and the boys said they was a goin' to."

This announcement fell on the company at first with little force, but the effect deepened as each began to reflect upon it. La Grange looked over at Hulda with a smile of comprehension. Mrs. Bates gasped and dropped hysterically into a heap in the wagon.

"The fools," said father Bates, getting down from his horse and coming to aid his wife. "They can't get married. They're both under age."

This was a heavy blow to the poor mother who had been awake and worrying all night. She began to sob with uncontrollable emotion.

Then Mrs. Woods and Hulda, with the assistance of all the distressed Bates family, lifted her from

the wagon and took her into the house where she sat on the lounge and allowed Hulda to bathe her head with camphor.

La Grange came to the door and said he would go over to the Dorms' ranch anyway, and see if he could find out anything definite.

It was several hours before he returned, for he had ridden about to find some clew to report. His report was only too affirming.

Buck had not returned to his home, but, as he frequently remained away over night, this had occasioned no surprise there. But La Grange had finally interviewed a sheepherder, who had heard from another sheepherder, that the two young people had been seen the previous evening horseback on the road that led to the County seat, and the two shepherds had seemed to understand that it meant an elopement.

La Grange broke the news as gently as possible to the stricken mother, and indignant father. Bates was angry and threatened violence. The attention of La Grange and Mr. Woods was turned to the fact that he must be kept there till his anger had somewhat spent itself. There would probably be bloodshed, if he were allowed to follow the couple, or go to the Dorms' homestead.

La Grange again volunteered to go to the Dorms' ranch to see what they intended to do in view of the discovered facts.

As the affair was clearly a sequel to the picnic, he felt it to be his duty to do what he could to prevent serious trouble.

The day was still warm, a kind of a day they call "hot" there, and he felt relaxed and tired as he rode along noting the waves of heated air against the dry, red hill slopes. The vision of Hulda's shocked, distressed look troubled him. He wondered if she would hold him and the dance responsible for this catastrophe.

He found the swarthy, black-eyed father of the "Dormses" in the shade of his house, tilted back in his chair, and smoking. He received the news in silence with unchanging expression. Finally he removed his pipe and held it a moment in the air.

"It just serves 'em right," he said. "If Bates had built that line fence years ago, them young uns wouldn't ha' got in so much courtin'. Watchin' sheep off'm the same line ain't good for no boy and girl. The amount of it is, I ain't goin' to do nothin'. Buck can't git married, nor I don't want him to. Both on 'em under age."

Mrs. Dorms appeared in the door listening in silence. It was evident to La Grange that they were enjoying the situation, as a revenge for long depredations on their sheep pasture. Their satisfaction seemed to be complete, and Dorms refused to take any action or make any statements in regard to what he desired to do or have done.

La Grange hurried back to the Woods' farmhouse thoroughly troubled and puzzled. His report filled the house with mourning. Bates swore that Millie should never be allowed to come home, and poor Mrs. Bates, weeping, begged that a marriage should somehow be arranged.

"Blame it," cried Bates in wrath, "we can't have a marriage without old Dorms' consent!"

La Grange was eating his delayed dinner in the dining-room, Bates was outside with Woods, swearing that the girl could go to Halifax, and Hulda came out to Mrs. Woods, who was kneading bread in the kitchen. Her face was feverish, and her eyes were shining with purpose.

"Mrs. Woods," she said, "I can't stand this waiting and suspense. I am going after the girl myself. Can I have Lila?"

"Bates will never let her come home," answered Mrs. Woods. "He means just what he says."

"It makes no difference," said the heroic young teacher. "I feel responsible. It was our picnic, and our exercises may have helped it on. If I can find her I will keep her till they are old enough to marry. For the sake of her poor mother, I am going anyway."

"But it is eighteen miles, and most of it a lonely mountain road," protested Mrs. Woods.

"If you are not afraid of losing Lila, I am not afraid for myself," said Hulda, turning away.

She hurried to her room, put on a light riding-habit, and went to the barn and brought out Lila, saddled and bridled. She went to Mr. Woods for directions as to her way, and said a few comforting words to the mother, and hurried away. She said nothing to La Grange. She surmised that he might offer to go with her if she told him, and she did not wish him to think that she had deliberately made a plan which necessarily involved him.

Alex, however, who had heard the talk in the kitchen and had ran ahead to the barn to help with Lila, came to him and faithfully reported it all. La Grange fanned himself with his hat in the shade of the porch, and kept his mind to himself.

He had no intention of letting the Cherry Valley teacher take that long and lonely ride alone. She would have to be out after dark and was liable to meet tramps and other dangerous characters as she neared the town. But he wanted to see that Bates would not follow in an irresponsible state of mind. He had no desire to be implicated in any shooting trouble, and for his sake as well as Hulda's, he wanted as little excitement as possible to follow the disastrous result of the picnic.

When it became known to the parents that Millie's teacher had gone with a determination to find her, Mrs. Bates became calm and Bates, after another round of wrathful and expressive words, took his family and went home. Then Mrs. Woods remonstrated with her husband for allowing the teacher to start alone on a really hazardous trip.

Then La Grange quickly set her mind at rest

"She is all right for a while," he said, "and I will overtake her. When it is cooler I can travel faster."

So that Hulda, riding through a lonely gorge, heard the rapid galloping of a horse on the hard road behind, and grasped her reins in nervous fear. She was already feeling the effects of the loneliness and the wildness of the surroundings.

Then the strains of a lively whistle came to her

ear, and she drew up her pony with an overwhelming feeling of gladness and relief.

As he came up she turned to him with a smile.

"Why did you come?" she said. "Did you think it would need us both?"

Then a sudden thought overwhelmed her, and filled her face with crimson. Would the shepherders say they were eloping too?

La Grange may have divined her sudden comprehension. Any way he had thought over the whole ground. He looked at her flushes and felt his own color mounting.

"This was a necesesity," he said, gravely. "It is unwise and unsafe for you to make this trip alone. As soon as we find Millie, I will return."

"Yes, that will be best," cried Hulda, with sudden vehemence. It did not occur to her, till the next day, that this generous plan to save her any mental vexation, meant the whole night in the saddle for him, and no rest at all.

She gave a long sigh of relief. Do you think the picnic was to blame?" she asked anxiously.

"Do you think the dance was to blame?" he asked, laughingly. "A family feud is sure to bring about an elopement," he continued. "It is only Romeo and Juliet over again, and these poor-children never heard of the Capulets and Montagues. No, it was sure to come. Were they learning anything in school, Miss Hardy?"

Hulda shook her head and bit her lip with vexation. They came into a deep cañon with the water

rippling over the rocks below them and the tall pines towering overhead.

The birds flew here and there, and hid in the silence of the forest. Sometimes a bushy grey squirrel ran across the road and up a tree. In after years Hulda could not forget that ride, and the memory of its rare pleasure was sweet to her, when all the sweetness of her young life seemed gone forever, and all other memories of those days were thrust back as poisonous and forbidden fruits.

As the shadows grew deep, and rich with the resinous odor of the pines, the romance of the situation occupied some thoughts in the young man's mind.

"Happy Buck," he thought. "He has no untamable ambition into prevent his running away at once with the lady of his choice." Then after a long silence he challenged Hulda to repeat the French lesson they had studied the previous evening.

Happily after dark the moon showed itself over the peaks, so that they had its help to pick the way over a rocky by-road.

When they came out on the top of a long ridge, Hulda knew that they must be nearing Forest City.

"Now," she said, and her caution indicated thought on the subject, "we must make some plan to find them without causing any stir in the town, if we can."

"I have already a plan in my head," answered La Grange, "and I think you will like it. There is but one livery stable in town, and if they came in here

late last night, their horses were put there, and the boy in the stable will be liable to know something about them. He will be alone at this time of night. You had best stop in the shade of the building." He drew out his watch. "It is only half past nine, and we have but a mile more."

Soon the lights of the town appeared through the scattered pine trees. Hulda was silent, grateful to leave all the managing to him. La Grange did not speak, and walking their horses quietly, they entered the town by a back street, where they met no one, and came up to the stable, a low, unpainted, isolated building.

Hulda drew Lila's rein in the depth of the shadow, and La Grange rode unconcernedly into the open door, lighted feebly by a lantern that hung at one side.

"Hello, there."

A shock-headed boy rolled out of one of the bunks in a little room at the right, and came out, closing the door behind him.

"What's up?" said La Grange with a tone of familiarity. "Gone to bed early—dance last night?"

"Nop."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothin'."

La Grange deliberately alighted from his horse, using his mind and his eyes in the meanwhile.

"Give my horse a good feed of hay, won't you? And wash him down in the morning."

He had been looking down the room at the hind quarters of a row of horses.

"Could I get another horse here for a night trip? Whose horse is that white one there?"

"That's Dormses," said the boy, lifting the saddle from La Grange's tired animal. La Grange smiled in the darkness.

"Who on earth is Dorms?"

"Friend of mine, sir; stopping here, give him a bunk."

Well, what of that?" asked the school-teacher sharply, as if irritated.

"Don't you know, sir? Tried to elope! Can't get no license. Got here, one o'clock last night horses all beat out. I knowed Buck. Why, I sheared sheep at the old man's ranch last May. Never had so much fun in my life. Buck come here last night too bashful to get a room for his girl. I took her over to the White Pine Hotel, and Buck staid here with me."

"What's the reason they didn't get married to-day?" asked La Grange.

"Couldn't get no license. Ain't old enough. Forgot to bring along pairnts and garjeans," and the boy chuckled gleefully over his joke.

"Where is the young man now?"

"Here in a bunk, asleep."

"What are they going to do?"

"Stranger you don't live around here?"

"No."

"Traveling?"

"Been traveling all day."

"Well, then, I'll tell you. We got it all fixed up.

They're going to skip to Sacramento on the train in the morning. Nobody knows 'em there, and they can swear in, some way."

"Well, then, I'll tell you what you do," said La Grange. "You hire me his horse for to-night. I'll leave mine here, and your young man won't need his horse."

The boy saw the profit for himself in the arrangement, and chuckled again.

"Want him now, sir?"

"Yes, put my saddle on him, I'm ready in a moment."

La Grange came out, took Lila's bit and walked further away from the stable.

"Do you see that lamp hanging from the porch across the vacant lot?" he said softly. "That is the White Pine Hotel. Millie is there and alone. Ride over and strike on a pillar with your whip to call some one. Simply state that you came to stay with Mr. Bates' daughter, and ask the proprietor to take your horse. To-morrow you can tell Buck I changed horses with him. I'm hungry, but I'll steal some peaches from an orchard out of town. Don't let them escape you to-morrow. Coax them to come with you if you can. If you can't do it, no one can. But I believe they are determined to elope anyway. I will try to arrange for a marriage if I can, and send you help. Now, good-night."

Hulda gave him her warm, ungloved hand.

"Oh, how I thank you. How good you are. You are so quick-witted, you can do almost everything," she said with warm enthusiasm.

"You are the good one," he said. "I only wanted to help, and save the fame of our picnic. I will admit to you now, this is a very serious thing—I want to see the marriage arranged."

He was still holding her hand. You must be very tired. Good-night, dear."

The word came from him with brotherly tenderness. With this last word warming her cheek and heart, Hulda galloped Lila up to the porch of the White Pine Hotel, rapped with her whip, and both the landlord and his wife came out to receive her.

Upon hearing her simple statement of her errand, the landlady bustled around with an apparent feeling of relief, and ushered the new-comer upstairs into a little room where Millie lay on the bed, and as usual, in a state of tearful helplessness.

When Buck Dorms went to the station early the next morning, to meet Millie as arranged, he placed himself at a corner where he could look furtively in all directions. But suddenly a firm hand was slipped through his arm, and he started nervously, to look down into the composed smiling face of his teacher. He felt a troublesome foreboding that he would be detained by some one, but he had expected it in the form of some masculine force, that he might elude by running around the building and escaping in the forest. But to be stopped by the calm-eyed Miss Hardy, who had her own peculiar and irresistible way of governing him, unnerved him, and unfitted him to use his pre-arranged plan of action.

"Come around to the hotel, Buck, I want to talk to you," she said.

"Who's at the hotel?"

"No one, only Millie."

"Well, I ain't stopping with Millie, or going anywhere with Millie," he said, rallying to his line of defense.

"Well, come and see her, can't you?" she smiled.

Buck was apprehensive, and suspected stratagem, possibly Mr. Bates or the sheriff.

"We can talk just as well here," he said, "or we can walk over by them pines there." He still appreciated a nearness of the trees.

"Well, that will do," she said kindly. "Come."

In a short distance they were out of sight of the straggling first arrivals at the station, and he listened patiently while she explained to him the utter folly of trying to get married in an illegal way, and urged him to wait till he was of age.

"And Millie and me go home?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied hesitatingly. "If her parents won't take her back, I will take her. I feel responsible."

"Not much you wont," interrupted Buck. "I'll take her myself. She's not going to be on charity. I run off with her, and I'm going to marry her. If you've stopped us it's all the same, we'll get off some way in less than a week. It's time we got married. Millie and me's been engaged ever since we herded sheep barefoot. We're all the time havin' sort o' rows because we can't explain to each other, and Millie cries too much. I'm goin' to win this thing up. I've got a hundred dollars, and lots of fellers gets married on less than that."

"But that isn't it," Hulda protested. "You're too young, you can't arrange it legally."

Buck laughed.

"Yes, but Millie ain't too young for old Bates to be scheming to marry her to Bill Cruiks. If I let this go by, I'll lose her sure. Have you talked to Millie? What does she say?"

"She refers everything to you."

"Good for her!" laughed the young man. "That's what I told her to do. You're awful good, Miss Hardy. You can stay with Millie if you want to, but 'tain't no use, we're goin' to run off now, or pretty soon after. Father'll give in if we stay away. He wants me home with the sheep."

"But Buck," cried Hulda, "will you keep Millie away and not get married?"

"Don't care," he said stubbornly. "Is Bates a comin'?"

"They have discarded Millie forever," she said sadly. "She is mine now, I have taken her." He shook his head; he was whittling a stick violently.

"I reckon she's mine."

The young teacher found that she had come to a stone wall, but she had made up her mind to stay with Millie till something could be done.

The presence of his teacher seemed to develop in Buck a more manly and open feeling, and presently he walked to the hotel with her, kissed Millie when he met her in the hall, and took breakfast with the two girls. Afterwards Hulda and Millie sat in the public parlor together, while Buck lounged in and

out, no longer afraid of a sudden attack from some Cherry Valley reserve force. For Hulda had finally told him that La Grange was trying to make some peaceable settlement between the parents for a marriage.

"You bet," said Buck, forcibly, "La Grange knows well enough that when one of us fellers gets away with a girl, we mean business. He's used to these here mountains."

Hulda sighed wearily.

Meanwhile La Grange had undertaken a task that was taxing his inventive faculties to the utmost. He took breakfast and a few hours of sleep at the Woods' farmhouse. But the anger of father Bates had not in the least abated. Mrs. Bates was comforted to know just how things were at Forest Grove, but it was clear that she had no influence with her husband. He was reluctantly willing to agree to a marriage, if Dorms gave his consent, but married or not, his girl should never come home. La Grange then discovered that the main cause of offense was that a certain wealthy Bill Cruiks held the mortgage on the Bates' ranch, and was waiting to marry Millie. Obviously, even in case of Millie's return, that marriage was broken up.

La Grange found Dorms, as before, smoking in the shade of the house. He motioned to La Grange to take a seat on a bench near him, listening in stoic silence to what he had to say. Mrs Dorms stood in the doorway, and the various, dark-eyed little Dormses hid around the corners, showing occasionally a glimpse of a black head or a pink dress.

La Grange calmly stated the case, saying that public sentiment demanded that he should either go ahead and force his son to come home, or give his consent to a marriage. Dorms finally removed his pipe, and ejaculated, "Let Buck alone. Why don't they go and get the girl?"

"Getting is not keeping," answered La Grange, evasively.

"Wall, I can't do nothin'. If I give in and have them youngones get married, Bates won't build that line fence from now on to eternity."

Both were silent, and La Grange newly discouraged, rose to go. He stood grinding his heel reflectively in the ground, when a positive idea occurred to him and he turned and sat down.

"Suppose, Mr. Dorms," he said, "that we could get Bates to agree to put up that line fence. Would you then consent to do something?"

The pipe came out then in a hurry, with scattering ashes, and Buck's father laughed long and loud. Mrs. Dorms sat down in the door-way with a sigh.

"Bates build that fence!" cried Dorms. "Why, sir, you couldn't get him to put up a foot of that fence for all the gals in the west. Fight for ten years and then put up that fence! Not much. I'll bet you fifty dollars he won't set a foot of it."

"I'm not betting," answered the amateur diplomat, "but I think he'll put up his half of the fence, if you settle this trouble one way or the other."

"No, he won't. Can't agree on the lines." Having thus settled the affair positively, he went on smok-

ing, and La Grange bent his head in his hands in silent thought.

"Why don't you have it surveyed?" he asked, after a time.

He had come to the point. It was originally a matter of dollars and cents, and still was.

"Survey," cried the economical farmer. "I won't pay for no survey to help Bates. I ain't got no money to spend on a survey."

La Grange walked to the corner and back, scattering a flock of little Dormses.

"Well," he said, "now, see here. I can survey those lines for you, and it won't cost you a cent. I'm not the County Surveyor, but I can get the lines all right."

Dorms gave a long, low whistle and stared at him in studious silence.

"You'll survey it, and Bates'll put up his half of the fence, you say?"

"That's my proposition." La Grange walked about nervously and waited.

Finally the old man rose with a grunt, and walked slowly into the low kitchen. Mrs. Dorms had been watching, and she followed him, saying eagerly:

"Sam, that girl of Bateses is the best cook on the Creek."

Then Dorms opened an old trunk, took out a package and carried it to La Grange.

"Here's my deeds," he said. "Now you get an agreement from Bates to build his half of the fence, and you can tend to the survey when you get ready."



Legrange convinces Dorms.

David of Juniper Gulch.

He returned and conferred with his wife, and came and announced the result.

"I ain't got no horses up, but if Mrs. Bates will come over with their team, me and the old woman will go up to Forest Grove with her, and either bring them young uns home, or git 'em married, accordin' to how they act."

La Grange hurried to Mrs. Bates with the good news, saw her start away, then again borrowing Buck's horse, went home to Bird's Flat.

It was nearly sundown when Mr. and Mrs. Dorms and Mrs. Bates arrived at the White Pine Hotel. The two women pleaded in vain with the young people to wait a few years, while the elder Dorms sat outside and smoked. He would have nothing to do with the preliminaries. Later, however, he went with his son to hunt up the County Clerk. A license was secured, and a Methodist preacher, who happened to pass the White Pine Hotel on his way to his evening services, was called in to perform the ceremony.

Then Hulda had another night's ride on Lila through the cañons and the forests accompanied by the young Mr. and Mrs. Dorms, the spring wagon with the elders rattling behind.

In her own room, at three o'clock in the morning, when she drew her right glove from her warm right hand, she held it lingeringly to her lips. It was the hand La Grange had held in the darkness at Forest Grove. Obviously managing the elopement affair of the whilom shepherdess and her swain, was not just

the best thing for two school-teachers, who had not the least intention of falling in love with each other.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUMMER DAYS.

Had La Grange been a practicing lawyer he might not have been willing to settle the Cherry Creek feud by making a survey of a line fence. He might have preferred to see the whole matter go into law, to stay in law for several generations.

As it was, it was the most telling blow he ever struck on the wedge of his own popularity in those parts. He made no secret of the fact that he wished to be called on by the public for all sorts of friendly and neighborly affairs, and perhaps others besides Hulda knew of his direct political aspirations.

Yet the motive for giving away two of his valuable Saturdays in surveying a line fence over a rocky hill and gulch was not a purely selfish one. A natural good-heartedness led him to propose it, and that he carried it out correctly was due to the quick wittedness and general ability, that so far in life had been his sure and shining star.

Neither was his motive particularly complex. He liked to survey, he liked to settle local difficulties, and he enjoyed the public thanks.

Whether Cherry Valley held further attractions for him was not so obvious. La Grange was not given

to making love as a pastime, and he had no intention of considering any young woman as a probable sweetheart or wife. His mind and heart were set on his own particular bright stars of fame and fortune—the law, public trust, and possibly public honor.

He sought the society of the Cherry Creek school teacher, as he sought any good thing that was conducive to his ends, openly and with honest frankness. So generally did the public look upon him, as a young man with a single ambition, that no one thought of suspecting him of matrimonial designs.

His visits to the Woods' farmhouse occasioned no remark, although they might have raised the secret envy of certain Bird's Flat young ladies who would have been willing to wait, even seven years for him, with very good grace.

On the Friday evening after the picnic, he arrived at the Woods' home just as the lamp was being lighted in the sitting room. He produced immediately for Hulda's inspection, several pocket plays of Shakespeare and a new book on law, that evidently gave him great pleasure. It was an advantage to him to know a young person interested in literary studies, to whom he could carry every fresh or pleasing thought or discovery.

If the young girl had looked forward, dreading embarrassment in their next meeting, that fear was pleasantly dispelled by his candid, earnest manner, and his lively interest in new thoughts and activities.

"Perhaps you will think I am stealing time of the state," he said. "I have read King John this week

at my noon recesses. I toss ball half an hour with the boys and then I take fifteen minutes for King John."

The girl simply stated that she knew very little of Shakespeare. La Grange looked at her with a slight contraction of the brow, peculiar to him.

"Oh, well," he said, "that won't do. You must read him. I will leave this Henry the Fifth here with you. You will enjoy Katherine any way. Read Katherine and King Henry, the last scene first, and then you will want to read it all. Now," he continued, as she looked into the book, "suppose we sit down and see if we can write that French verb from memory. I am not very sure I can do it. I have been so busy this week."

Hulda seated herself opposite to him, and with bashful little Trummy Woods hiding his face in her lap, she wrote the exercise quite to the satisfaction of her exacting teacher.

After an hour with the books, they joined the Woods family in the porch, where they were enjoying the starlight and a balmy cooling breeze that had risen after the heat of the day. La Grange leaned back, and Hulda, sitting on the edge of the porch, could see his face in a bar of light from the window. He and Mr. Woods began speaking of the proposed survey on the morrow, and Mrs. Woods turned to tell Hulda that she had seen Buck Dorms pass by that day with a load of lumber, and that the site of the house had been fixed on a certain little hill in sight of the school-house. Then a bucket of cool, fresh

grapes were brought, and La Grange said there were no grapes on Bird's Flat. He prophesied the day when Cherry Valley would be set out in oranges. Mr. Woods thought it was a wild idea, and Mrs. Woods and Hulda retired, leaving them discussing the subject in all its branches.

The next evening was spent in very much the same way at the farmhouse, and Sunday morning La Grange went away in the cool of the morning before Hulda awoke.

The following Friday evening there was more French and more Shakespeare in the same quiet way. There was some amusement over the fact that Bates had employed his new son-in-law to build the line fence as soon as the survey should be completed.

There had been a hot week along the foothill range. The red slopes and white rocky river beds grew redder and whiter in the glaring sun. The creeks in the gorges hushed every day some murmuring sound, and became silent behind great rocks, and under banks, in deep and mirror-like pools.

The dusty roads were deserted, and the fruits in the home orchards fell to the ground in their luscious ripeness, and the children, feasting, refused to go to their regular meals. All the slopes and little flats, that not many years later, were turned into beautiful orchards, lay hot and silent, but for the tinkling cowbells in the wooded hollows.

La Grange, walking over a hot hillside all that Saturday forenoon, had at last found a government post, the loss of which had caused local land troubles

for many years. A prospector, wishing to start a shaft under a government corner, had thrown out the post with his shovel and covered it with the dirt and rock from his opening. Having brought it to light La Grange sighted the last line in which his work was concerned, gave Buck a few final directions, and his task was done.

He returned to the Woods' farmhouse; his books were there, and he could go to Bird's Flat as well in the cool of the evening. As he rode slowly along the creek road he was conscious of a feeling of oppression and weariness unusual to him. His life was one of constant toil and application in some way or other, and it was not unnatural that he should begin to feel its wear this hot day in July.

At the farmhouse he tied his horse under a tree in the lane, and went around to the shaded north porch. The Cherry Valley school-teacher was seated on the edge of the porch where it joined the little wing of her room. Her white dress lay in spotless folds around her, and her hands were folded over a blue volume in her lap. Her head lay back against its frame of dark hair and her eyes were closed over the thoughts that were absorbing her mind. She had discarded her Alice and Katherine for Aurora Leigh. Aurora seemed like a sister and friend, and her noble deeds and sweet counsels were comforting to her. She did not even dream in her simple virtue that she in her one practical deed had been as noble as the ideal and elevated English character. She could not draw any comparison. She only took Aurora to her heart and it comforted her.

La Grange, warm, dusty and tired, sat down as silently as he had come, and looked at the cool, charming picture; but only for a moment. His throbbing head grew light, and Hulda started up to see him leaning against a post, with closed eyes and drooping head. The girl followed her only impulse, that was to run to his aid. She took his head on her arm and fanned him violently with his hat. A moment after, when he opened his eyes, he felt for a second the sensation of being in a new, white world, as entrancing as it was fleeting; she had gone, but he closed his eyes again to hold the vision of the white, round shoulders above his head, and the white face and tender dark eyes so close over his forehead.

She returned quickly with the lounge cushion and a glass of water, both of which he accepted speechlessly. Then she came again with a handkerchief dripping, which she folded on his brow. The color was warming up in her face then, and she gave a quick sigh of relief, as he lay down with the cushion under his head.

"Now, I am going to call Mrs. Woods," she said. She turned to go, but that moment he was holding her hand.

"Thank you," he whispered.

She darted away.

Mrs. Woods came with her usual kind solicitation, but the girl kept in the background. She had suddenly grown shy. La Grange sat up, took a stimulating drink that Mrs. Woods brought, and professed himself better, and honestly ashamed of his attack of

weakness. He said he had never even felt the sensation of faintness before, but he believed, that for a moment, he had been unconscious. Mrs. Woods brought out a large rocking chair, which he gratefully accepted, and sat slowly recovering, fanning himself with his hat.

Mrs. Woods brought out her sewing, and Hulda resumed her former seat and her book, throwing up occasionally a shy glance at the patient, who was regarding her furtively behind his hat with an expression and manner quite unlike himself.

La Grange left at sundown, Mrs. Woods and the Cherry Valley school-teacher going with him to the orchard gate, where he had left his horse, and both expressing regrets to see him go so worn and tired. He gave a hand in parting to each of the women, they being on opposite sides of his horse, and Mrs. Woods did not see that he held the younger woman's hand till she drew it away.

He turned several times to look back from the Creek road to see Hulda's white-robed form standing alone by the gate. His strongest impulse was to conjure up an excuse to remain. He had received something in the nature of a shock. Some impression had come to him that he could not define or readily cast off. This intellectual, yet strangely crude girl, had suddenly seemed to become glorified in his eyes, and her existence seemed to come into his life with that nearness he thought an own sister's might have.

He did not define it as love, he had no wish to do

that; yet on this occasion it was a privation to go away from her. He tried to shake off the impression. He called himself a boy, he thought he must be homesick.

At Bird's Flat he pleaded illness and received a week's leave of absence. The next day he went to his mountain home at Rocky Divide, and spent a week with the woman he called his mother and the children. It was a week of rest. His foster brothers and sisters, who were uproarious with delight to see him home, would allow no books, and Mrs. La Grange wanted his advice about many things. Then it was but a rest to him to help the boys get the cattle out of the forest, and start them off to market.

But the young Cherry Valley school-teacher went from the orchard gate to her room, and sat down by her window, and a few tears fell on the white-robed arm, that had been stretched so impulsively to the aid of the overworked young amateur surveyor.

She threw the blue book out of her sight. "I am not good enough to read it," she said. She was a criminal, self accused, and condemned, and why?

Just why, she did not know. When she bent over him to support him with her arm, had her impulsive lips touched a wave of dark hair? And if they had, did La Grange know it? She felt that she was growing to be more of a child and less of a woman every day. It was the rush of tenderness that came to her, as she saw him faint on her arm that accused her. It was her feelings more than what she had done. She resolved to conquer her weakness, and to punish

herself, should he respect her enough to come again, by a stiffness in her manners, which would show him, at least, that she had repented, of whatever impropriety he might think her guilty.

He did come several times during her remaining two months at Cherry Creek, but he had his habitual candor of speech and ease of manner. He had nothing to say to her that any one need not hear, and she was glad. She grew in mental strength, personal presence and self-control, so that when Mr. Woods, at the end of her term, took her in the spring wagon back to Hardup, she felt the change that had come over her, and appreciated all the practical benefits she had received from the tuition of the Bird's Flat teacher.

No one appreciated Hulda's new mental and personal graces more than Joseph Cornman. He noticed at once an added spirit and beauty in her eyes, a varied expression in her face, and a new sweetness in her smile.

She was more slender also, and seemed taller, and her manners were more studied and graceful.

Hulda, however, gave but little attention to the observing Hardup teacher. She relieved her mother of the household cares, and gave all her spare time to her reading. She added Chaucer, Spencer and Milton to her poets, Bacon, Aristotle and Marcus Aurelius to her philosophers.

Happily David was away and there was nothing to prevent the best use of her time. Mr. Cornman examined her books quizzically, and then added a Roman History and Guizot's France from his trunk.

La Grange had gone to Rocky Divide. He had said nothing about his future. She looked forward to no immediate prospect of seeing him. Anyway she wanted to complete a certain amount of reading for his approval, when they should chance to meet again.

Cis Beverly came often to the cottage. There was a new seriousness in her manner. She had grown older in looks, and had lost a manner of forced gayety that she brought with her from the city. She was cheerful, too, in a quiet way. She was accustomed to slip in at the back door and spend the afternoon with Mrs. Hardy, Hulda, in her room with her books, not knowing of her presence. She sometimes brought little articles of clothing she had made for Nonie, and Mrs. Hardy would accept them, sighing over them when she had gone. Cis became very handy with the child. She would rock her to sleep whenever she came, and often took her out in the orchard for hours. She taught the little one her first words, and her first steps, and was so gentle and reservedly motherly with her always, that Mrs. Hardy opened her heart to the girl, grew newly attached to her, and learned to long for the sound of her steps in the quiet house.

Cis, thoroughly reliant on the line of conduct she had adopted, loved her friends and was grateful to them, as if she herself had not forced them to this position.

As she looked back upon her fall, she abhorred it the more, and feared a revelation with greater in-

tensity. But the more settled she became in the silence of Mrs. Hardy and Hulda, the less she closed her natural heart against the child, and the stifled feelings of mother love returned.

One day the child was feverish, and Cis insisted on holding it all the afternoon, and lulled it to sleep at last at sundown in her gentle arms. Hulda had come down, prepared the evening meal, and rang the bell for the teacher, not knowing that Cis was in the south bedroom with her mother. When Cis came out softly with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, Hulda felt a sudden new tenderness for her. She had really avoided her since her return.

When tea was over she snatched a light wrap and followed Cis, who was hurrying to get on her way home before dark.

"Let me go a ways with you," she called, and the two girls walked down the lane together, as they had done as school-children so many times.

The hot summer had given away to the smoky cooler autumn, and the small inclosed fields and bare hills were dun and dry. The high forest covered mountains were wrapped in dark blue behind their thin, pale haze, and nearer the groves of young pines were bright with their evergreen freshness.

The moon rose dimly over the mountain line. Hulda looked from the tender beauty of the autumn scene she loved so well, to the pretty downcast face of her quiet companion. Her gray dress was so plain, yet so exact and dainty in fit.

She felt a strange pity for the girl surge into her

heart, but she was still unreconciled to her bold defiance of those who were helping her. It was still an estrangement between them. It was hard to talk to Cis. She could think of nothing to say. She finally, as a last resort, spoke of David.

"Now, if David had been here," she said, "I suppose we might have gone to the church social to-night."

"He would have taken you," answered Cis gently, "but me, he never thinks of any more."

"But he brought you to the picnic."

"Oh, well," said Cis decidedly, "but that doesn't count."

"I wish he would come home anyway," answered Hulda. Not that she did, exactly, but the expression answered in place of expressing an opinion.

"Isn't one lover enough?" cried Cis, sarcastically.

Hulda started, and her sudden color was not visible in the dusk.

"Cis! why I haven't any lover at all!"

But Cis laughed. "The ever-devoted Joseph Cornman," she said in mock earnestness. "Why do you keep him in suspense? Dave told me at the picnic you were going to marry him sure."

"Dave is silly," said Hulda.

"I think he is kind and good," murmured Cis, reflectively. She understood her serious and honest-hearted friend well enough to know that her sudden pang of jealousy had been unwarranted.

Presently the girls parted with quiet good-nights, the one with a pale saddened face, just coming out of

the vortex of trouble; and the dark-eyed girl with the proud bearing, and the elastic step of health and hope, just entering into the shadow of bereavement and sorrow.

Hulda walked home slowly. The thought of her day's studies passed out of her mind. The fresh night air and the moonlight brought memories of Lila and the mountain roads. She laid her hand on the gate with a smile on her lips. The rose bushes had grown up tall and neglected that summer. She felt the chill of a presence before she saw the tall form in the path before her, but it was not the form that was in her mental vision.

She wanted to push by, and run up the path, but the teacher prevented her.

"Wait," he said solemnly, stretching his long arm before her, "I want to talk to you."

"Oh, certainly," said the girl. She dared not be rude, but she shrank back against the closed gate.

Mr. Cornman paused to give greater emphasis to what he wished to say, then came a step nearer.

"Have you been thinking over my proposition, Miss Hardy?"

The girl was confused and distressed.

"Why, no. What proposition?" He mistook her agitation for emotion.

"My proposition to make you my wife." He loomed up with horrible nearness.

"Oh, don't, please," cried the girl, throwing up her hands before her. "You must not speak of it again. You know I can't." She still wished to get away from him without offending him.

The teacher's voice was husky when he spoke.

"Why? please explain. You know as well as I, that it is the best thing you can do. I can educate you and get you a better position, and make something of you."

The girl trembled with anger; she could not answer these selfish inducements. "Oh, I cannot marry you," she said helplessly.

"Why? Tell me."

His manner of authority frightened her. She was losing her self-control. She thought that if she gave the true reason, he might listen to her and respect her for it.

"Oh," she said spasmodically, "I—I—cannot. I—I—I—love another."

Then she dropped her face in her hands, red with shame, that she had made such an avowal.

It was a good and sufficient reason, however, to Joseph Cornman. His local and temporal ambition to possess the bright girl for his wife, ended in contempt for her.

She had refused him, and for whom? An uneducated and common man. A rude miner, a man who made open sport of him.

"Ah," he said, in a voice full of bitterness and satire. "Ah, and so Strong is a better man than I am. Well, I wish you joy. Good-night."

He went into the house and left her standing there, while the color came back to her cheek and the load lifted from her heart.

"What luck!" she said to herself. "He thinks it is

Dave. I am saved. Poor Dave must bear all the blame. Oh, dear, it's horrid, but I'm glad he thinks it is Dave."

Mr. Cornman, however, took bitterly the thought that David was preferred to himself. As his heart had never been affected, it was the slight to his personality that hurt him, and he was not a man to carry offenses lightly. He had no intention of leaving the shelter of Mrs. Hardy's house, but he was determined that the girl should in some way feel his power.

If he had ever been disposed to be a friend to the widow's daughter, he now no longer possessed that disposition in any respect.

And the impression he had received that her young affections had been fixed upon David Strong, remained with him to be used in after years, as an evidence against her on a point of grave moment to the young woman.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SNOWY RIDE.

Joseph Cornman's profundity as a scholar, and his ability as a teacher, were qualities destined to meet with a sure reward in that part of the state, and his first step in the chair of the County Superintendent of schools was effected. He had been appointed one of the members of the County Board of Examination, and, when his official notification came, the first week in December, he carried it down to the tea table and laid it before Hulda, with his usual manner of repressed self-satisfaction. The girl lifted up her bright eyes and congratulated him with a few well chosen words. She knew his worth and abilities, and she was glad others had recognized them.

After deliberately folding up the letter and putting it away in his inner coat pocket, he produced another letter and handed it over to her.

"I did not know you had a correspondent at Forest Grove," he said, making no apology for the fact that he had scrutinized her letter.

Hulda knew the bold, plain writing at a glance. La Grange had written to her. She busied herself over the serving to try to draw attention from the rich, warm color that rose to her temples, but she made no remark to satisfy the teacher's curiosity, and did not open the letter until he had gone up-stairs.

The communication was characteristic of La Grange, his practical methods and his warm-hearted friendship.

"I have taken the place of the Forest Grove teacher," it ran. "Next term I will be regularly elected to the principalship. The second position will be vacant at the end of the term, and if you will forward your application now, I will help you all I can. You had best come and see the trustees in person before the 25th. This position will advance you in work and methods much better than any country position. Very sincerely, your friend, Edward La Grange."

The girl threw aside her dignity before her mother, and gave expression to her delight, but she decided to conceal her new plan from Mr. Cornman.

In this isolated hill village the matter of a boarder was of considerable importance to Mrs. Hardy, besides the teacher was in no way objectionable to her. For this reason the daughter had withheld from her a knowledge of his fruitless wooing, and with the same instinct, she did not wish to excite his jealousy or animosity.

Mrs. Hardy was quite happy and contented with the circumstances and surroundings of her quiet life. She had a good and promptly paying boarder to occupy the house with her when Hulda was away. Cis was even growing to be a companion to her. Hulda had brightened the house with new carpets and furniture, and stored the closets with new dresses and wraps.

During this lowering and rainy month of December, the widow and her daughter had the house mostly to themselves, for the teacher was absent at Forest Grove much of the time, looking into the duties and responsibilities of his new office.

David was around, however, making himself at home before the cosy sitting-room fire, and it was he who engaged a horse and saddle for Hulda on the 21st, assisted her to mount, and stood with Mrs. Hardy watching her as she rode away, happy and smiling.

A neat, black habit set off her now graceful figure, and her long skirt swept the side of the glossy, black horse. A jaunty boy's cap set closely to her dark head, and her sparkling eyes and red cheeks were brought out in new brilliancy by her black habit.

Several window sashes were thrown up as she clattered through the main street; an unnecessary detour, but the girl was happy and light hearted, and she had no aversion to showing herself to the town's people.

"Ain't that Hardy girl getting handsome," called one woman, over the fence to her neighbor, as she passed, and this was also the first thought that came to the mind of young La Grange, when he met her at the mounting block of the White Pine Hotel.

And Hulda, for a moment, did not know the young man who came and held out his hand as she alighted unaided. She caught her breath and blushed vividly. There was a great change in her beardless student friend of Cherry Valley—he had grown a mustache.

He held her hand a moment too long, had there been observers, and looked at her with candid admiration.

"How you have changed!" he exclaimed.

"But you haven't, Mr. La Grange," she said laughing, with a mischievous glance of meaning.

She followed him into the large, square parlor of the rambling old house, and thought of the pastoral drama of Buck and Millie, as she saw the old threadbare lounge and other familiar objects. She threw her riding-skirt over a chair. Her long black dress-skirt was a copy of her riding-skirt and hung in folds to her feet. She sat down to talk to La Grange, in jaunty cap, gauntlet-gloves, and her riding-whip across her lap.

"And now," he said, after they had laughed over the Cherry Valley people, as they had never dared to do at the Woods' farmhouse, "if you don't mind walking about town with me, we will go and see those trustees. It will not take long, for we are not expected to say much."

In fact, La Grange had already said all that was necessary, and the trustees had no intention of rejecting a candidate offered by so popular a young man as the new principal. In less than a hour, she had been assured by the three trustees that her application would be accepted, and they walked back to the hotel, making a sensation among the idlers of the town. Standing on the hotel porch she thanked him for his help; he lifted his hat formally and went away. He had previously told her, however, that he would get a

horse and be around about two o'clock to ride part way home with her.

Hulda ate her dinner in the low dining-room, a canary singing madly in a corner back of her, and in her heart echoed all the glad joy of the song. Her life seemed lifted up above the usual plane, and everything before her seemed just as she would have it. She felt like a queen, as she ate the under done roast and dry pie. She did not even know how they tasted. But whether her idyllic, mental condition came from the prospect of having a position in the leading social center of the county, or the prospect of being near La Grange, she did not know. She made no analysis of her thoughts; any way she was happy.

She smoothed her hair and reset her cap in the solitary parlor, and settled down in a rocker by the fire with a well-thumbed novel she had found on the table.

What with her thoughts and her book, she was so absorbed that she did not notice that a tall figure appeared in the doorway, closed the door, and came towards her. Then she heard the step and felt the chilling presence of the Hardup teacher, and she looked up to see him standing over her, with an unusual look of almost malicious meaning and a positive manner of authority.

He smiled feebly and without waiting for her to speak, drew a chair close to her and untied a roll of papers he had brought.

"I am sorry," he said, deliberately, looking down at the papers, "but I understand you are applying for

a position here, and I came to call your attention to a matter which has just lately come to my knowledge, and which you ought to take into consideration."

Hulda's book dropped to the floor, and she sat erect, waiting breathlessly.

"I was much surprised last March," he continued, cruelly, with a sharp glance, when you took a First Grade Certificate, for I knew that your scholarship was not up to the standard in certain things. In helping to arrange and pack away, recently, the papers of the Board of Examination, I took the trouble to look over your old papers, and I find that," here he hesitated and looked up at her, but she sat motionless with wide, innocent eyes, "I find," he went on, "that some one at that time had the fraudulent kindness to mark your papers higher than they deserved."

"Oh! Oh!" the girl's voice was full of surprise.

He went on slowly, weighing his words to give pain, paying no attention to her bewilderment.

"I also find that your officious friend, Mr. La Grange, was assisting the Board, and I had no difficulty in tracing the marking to his pencil. The conclusion is forced to my mind that you must have employed this young man to do this for you—"

The girl sprang to her feet, with flashing eyes, and cried with trembling voice:

"I did nothing of the kind and you know it, Mr. Cornman."

Her accuser quailed a little before her anger and defiance.

"Don't get excited. Sit down," he said. "We

will grant that you did not, but why did he do it? What object could he have had? If it were for friendship, it seems to me it was rather impromptu friendship." The tone was more insinuating and cruel than the words. It roused the girl to her own defense.

"It was nothing of the kind," she cried. "There is some mistake. Let me see the papers."

She sat down and examined the papers, one at a time, as he laid them before her. Her eyes, better trained than formerly, ran through them quickly, and the forgery became apparent. She saw that several imperfectly solved problems in arithmetic had been marked as perfect. She folded the paper with a trembling hand and a white face. She was sick at heart. She handed them all back without looking further. The facts were against La Grange, whatever his motive may have been, and the evidence was that her certificate had been fraudulently obtained. She was thoroughly humbled.

"Are you going to revoke my certificate?" she asked in a low broken voice. She covered her face with her hands and bowed her head on the table. Joseph Cornman was enjoying her misery and his own triumph, and he took his time to think over his answer, while he tied up the papers. He really had no intention of making the matter public. His political instincts told him that he would gain nothing by making a public enemy of La Grange. For his own advancements he needed him as a friend. His main object had been the humiliation of the girl who had

refused him. His secondary object was to keep her from taking a position in Forest Grove or Hardup, or any other place where he wished to push his own influence. He could not make use of her. She would only be in the way.

"Well," he said slowly, looking over her bowed head, "there is no reason why I should proceed against you to revoke your certificate. I would advise you not to teach this winter. You can come back in March and pass again, and then burn your illegal certificate."

"My illegal certificate?" cried the girl, starting to her feet. "My illegal certificate shall be burned now."

Her tormentor rose and came toward her, and she shrank back to escape his touch.

"Don't get excited," he said firmly. "I am your friend. I will protect you. Don't do anything rash. You can trust me."

"But I don't want to be protected," said Hulda. "It was done without my knowledge and I shall give up my certificate."

"And ruin your friend?" coldly and sneeringly, asked her antagonist, who had gone too far and now saw possible damages to himself

"He deserves to be ruined," she cried indignantly. "I don't see why he did it."

She walked away to compose herself. Presently she came back calm and reasonable.

"You are right," she said humbly. "I shall stop teaching and try for a certificate in the spring. But

Mr. La Grange had no right to do as he did. He shall apologize to the Board of Examianation. He must make it right."

She walked to the farther end of the room, her head bowed over her clasped hands. The Hardup teacher cleared his throat, looked at his watch and hesitatingly approached her.

"But it was my duty to tell you, Miss Hardy. I did not intend that it should go any further."

"Oh, certainly."

She did not turn or move. He quietly took his hat and went out of the room. His object had been obtained, as far as he had an object. He wished the girl to feel that in losing him, she had lost her most useful friend, and his conviction was that she was now overwhelmed with that loss.

But it was not that loss, or any material loss of her own that the girl felt so deeply. An idol lay at her feet. She had been worshiping a false god. La Grange had plainly committed a petty deception to help a young woman he had suddenly become interested in, that woman herself.

She had held her head high, and her heart was pure and noble, but everywhere her feet seemed to be led into the mire. Appearances were somehow always against her to show that she was conniving with deception. She thought bitterly of Cis and her blind sacrifice for her. But this was not like that. It seemed to take a support from her young life. Were none good, and honest, and noble? None at all? But him. She could not bear to think that he possessed the slightest fault.

La Grange came, and found her standing silent and motionless, her two hands behind her firmly holding each end of her riding-whip. She did not hear him till he spoke, then she lifted a white face that had grown strangely old and sad since he last saw it.

"What is it? Are you ill?"

He took hold of her arm with gentle solicitude. Then she lifted her head proudly.

"No, but I am ready to go home. Come, Mr. La Grange, I want to talk to you."

He followed her silently, wondering. He had never seen this gentle girl like this. He put her on her horse, and then, together, both handsome, erect, well-mounted, they galloped down the main street, La Grange touching his hat right and left to acquaintances.

La Grange knew what she had not perceived; that it was very cold. The light, fleecy clouds gathering all the morning, had settled together into strange looking low clouds drawing from the east.

But the change in the atmosphere had not chilled him as did the sudden change in the manner of his companion. He let her have her own way of conduct, however, watching her wonderingly as he kept up with her flying gallop, till they reached a narrow road through a grove of young pines. Then he reached out with a strong, quick movement, grasped her bridle reins, and drew both horses to a stop.

"We have had quite enough of this," he said firmly. "Why are you treating me this way, after I have been engaged in doing you a service. What is it, please, Miss Hardy?"

She turned a white face frankly towards him.

"You have done me a strange service. You have nearly ruined me," she said sadly. "Oh, what were you thinking of, to do such a thing?"

La Grange dropped her horse's rein and regarded her with open amazement.

"Do? The deuce! What have I done now? Danced again?"

"Well, you shall know," she said. "You marked up my papers last spring, and got me a fraudulent certificate."

He gave a long, low whistle.

"And that Cornman has hunted them up and been looking them all over. Oh, the dickens he has! Well, the low, sneaking dog! What do you think of such a low-lived action as that?"

The horses were moving on slowly, and she timidly looked up at his flushed face. In his indignation he was not carefully choosing his words.

"It is your action I am speaking of," she said, with forced firmness and composure.

He laughed then.

"Only this, Miss Hardy. I tried to please you, and have offended you, and he tried to offend you, and has pleased you."

"Oh, no, no, don't say that." She turned away her head, and he grew serious, as he noted her trembling voice.

The horses with loosened reins walked slowly, and when he spoke again his voice was more kind.

"Well, as I am found out," he said, "I may as

well confess. I did mark up a few of your papers, but I did it with the kindest of motives. I knew of you before I saw you that day. My foster father knew your father and worked under him. I remember very well the time your father was killed. My father rode horseback thirty miles to the funeral. When you came before the Board I didn't want you to fail. I knew it would hurt your future chances. Now, wasn't that kind?" But she was silent with averted face.

"But the matter is not what you think it is. Your foxy Mr. Joseph Cornman is too fast. He is caught in his own trap. Some of your papers were very fine, and when I looked them all over later, I saw that your best papers would have made up the required per cent any way. In fact the Superintendent noticed my markings, reproved me for my errors, as he supposed them, and granted you the certificate on your own merits. So you see the old fox has put his foot in it, and what have you to blame me for, Miss Hardy?"

Hulda lifted her face, and she smiled faintly. It was some relief to her to know that her position was clear and honest but her eyes were on the rocky bed of the graded road they were descending. She was silent.

"Why do you condemn me?" he said. "Have you no forgiveness for an innocent man?"

A warm color surged to her cheeks. They rode under the tall pines, that lifted long, ragged arms over the roadway. He then leaned over, seized the

bridle rein and stopped the horses close together. He leaned forward to try to look into her downcast eyes.

"Come, come, Hulda, child, forgive a man who pleads for forgiveness. I confess it was cool impudence. I had no right to do it."

She finally looked up, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Very well. Please drop the rein, Mr. La Grange." She spoke with an effort, and her cheeks were scarlet.

The horses moved on and La Grange twirled his whip, with a perplexed look. She glanced at him nervously and spoke more calmly.

"There is nothing to forgive. I wouldn't care for myself, even if it had injured me, but it is yourself; it is the wrong you have done yourself."

"How?" He stopped his own horse in his sudden surprise, but she rode on and he followed. "How have I wronged myself, pray? Cornman, the old fox, will never say a word. It would kill him in this county, and he knows it. Besides he knows that the County Superintendent would kick him out of his place if he finds out he has been tampering with old records. And you," he reached and took her glove hand that hung by her side, "you will forgive me, won't you?"

But she drew the hand away and looked up to him with scarlet cheeks and pleading eyes.

"But do you forgive yourself? I think it was a dishonest act, any way, Mr. La Grange. It was not noble—it was deceit. I did not think you could do anything of that kind."

He did not share in her misery, and laughed, but with an uneasy tone.

"Well, I should say! That is a fine point to draw on me. You call a well-meant favor an ignoble deed. You are complimentary. How would I ever succeed in this world if I drew such fine points? How am I to educate my foster brothers and spend my time splitting hairs like that? Well, well. What do you think of my representing myself to be older than I am, to get the Forest Grove school. I had to do it. Why, I am going to have pupils older than myself."

The girl's bowed face was turned from him, and she made no reply. But her silence troubled him and his face was more serious than his words were. She rode on, the tears in her eyes blinding her. She did not know that occasionally a white flake of snow fell on her cap. The annoyance the young man felt to be attacked on a point of honor, was somewhat soothed by the deep and sincere interest his companion evinced, but she did not seem to accept his explanation.

They came to a little flowing spring in the bank of the road, and both horses thrust their noses into it. La Grange slid to his feet to tighten his saddle girth, then he went between the horses.

"Well, if I am not honest," he said sarcastically, "at least I am good enough to be allowed to tighten your saddle girth."

He looked up to see a glistening tear drop onto her glove.

"Now, this is too much," he said, going around to her side. "I can't have a girl crying for my bad deeds. Why do you care, Hulda? What difference does it make?" He was looking up into her face, that she had lifted proudly, then a light broke in upon him. "Is it because, because," he reached and imprisoned both her hands; "well, say because you might have loved me?"

She freed one hand now to shield her face.

"If you think so badly about it, why think of me! I wanted your trust and faith. It was everything to me. I have lived upon it; but I wanted you to think I was better than I am. I loved you, as a man loves his right hand, but I wouldn't have told you so, though, now. I have felt that you were the woman God made for me, and I was patient to wait. I wish I were good enough for you. I would like to kiss those tears away, but I love you too much, to ask you to forgive a man you despise."

His hat in his hand, he dropped his dark head in her lap. A flake of snow fell on his hair. With a swift movement she brushed it away, and then yielding to her impulse she let her hand rest on his head.

"Edward," she said softly.

"Yes, dear."

"I don't despise you, I can't, but I am so sorry about these little things. That was wrong. I wish you would change your principles—"

But that was placing it upon too serious ground. It could but offend him. He had received no scrupulous Methodistical training. He turned away, impatiently.

"Oh, have done with my principles. You are Puritanical, foolish, wild. If this silly thing can part us, we had better part now."

This was a boy's cruelty. The girl's physical strength forsook her. She had been under long excitement. She slipped from her saddle and leaned against her horse, sobbing and trembling.

Then he took her in his arms and drew her face to his shoulder.

"God bless you, my dear girl. I half believe you do love me, or might love me, or ought to love me, enough to forgive me." He kissed her white cheek. "My darling girl, tell me."

But she freed herself and caught up her long skirt.

"Oh, see how it snows! Mr. La Grange, please put me on my horse."

But he held her arm. "A moment ago you called me Edward."

She turned away her face. She had grown rigid, and her face was as white as the flakes of snow piling on her cap.

"Oh, please," she murmured, "I must go—see the snow."

He put his two hands on her cheeks and turned her face to his. But there was no look of forgiveness in her sad, dark eyes. He kissed her brow reverently, took her bridle reins and held his hand for her mounting. She placed her foot in his palm and sprang into the saddle. He took his overcoat from his saddle and offered it to her.

"Oh, no," she said, "I'll not take it. You have

four miles to go and you will need it. I am near the top of the last grade. I will soon be home." She held out her hand. "Thank you, and good-by, Edward La Grange."

He took her hand. "I will meet you when school opens."

"I fear not. After I saw Mr. Cornman I wrote a letter and withdrew my application." Then she lowered her face, for the crimson tide was coming back to her cheek. "I had rather go back to Cherry Creek, anyway."

"I presume so," he said, "from what you have said to me to-day."

She snatched her hand with a swift glance. She would lose her self-control again.

"You don't understand me," she cried. She had loosened her rein, and the impatient horse bounded away.

She told her mother everything necessary to explain her change of plan. She thought of her, as she dashed home through the falling snow, as her noblest companion, her best and dearest friend. She knew that her mother would commend her course, and just now, she wanted the comfort that it would give her.

And her mother did commend her, and praise her.

"You're just like your father," she said. "He'd give up everything for a point of principle. Mr. Cornman did right; we can't blame him, and because he was really mistaken does not alter the right of the thing. While I think Mr. La Grange really



A Subject for a Painting.

David of Juniper Gulch.

meant to do a dishonest thing at first. Now, do go up-stairs, Hulda, and change your damp clothes."

But the girl in her own room kissed her cap as she took it off. She had not told her mother all, of her struggle with love and the pain that lay on her heart with the image of her fallen idol. And she was glad afterward and forever that she had not given her good mother unnecessary pain.

But she went that night alone to the old brown Methodist Meeting house, and she was kneeling on the cold, bare floor as the gray haired minister prayed.

"Lord," he said, "lead us not into temptation. Spare our dear young people. We pray that they may be led aright, may they spurn evil, and think of that which is good. Lord help our dear young people."

But referring it to the Lord was about all the good man ever did, to search out the paths by which his young people might be led into temptation. Yet the girl was comforted. There were temptations; the minister evidently knew that.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. CORNMAN.

New Year's day was a day of unusual excitement at the Hardy cottage. Cis came in the morning, trying to appear as gay and light-hearted as in the old days before she went away.

Hulda, in her oldest dress, had swept, and garished, and baked, till she was tired and nervous. Mrs. Hardy busied herself giving directions, and finishing a dress for her daughter to wear in the evening. David made his usefulness and his noise predominant, and Hulda was the principal sufferer from his nonsense.

"Cut out, skunked, and jilted forever," he cried, laughingly, as he stood upon a chair to hang a picture Hulda had dusted. "Who'd a thought it, Hulda, that you'd get left in this way. Married! This beast a hanging." Then he sat down by Cis, who was whipping a plate of eggs to a froth, and drew from his pocket the *Forest Grove Mountain Messenger*. He read aloud for the tenth time that day the item that caused him so much merriment.

"The popular and efficient teacher from Hardup, Mr. Joseph Cornman, was married on Christmas day at Sacramento at the Imperial Hotel. The lady, who was Miss Aurelia Hawthorne Stalker, had just arrived

from Branchtown, Vermont, and is somewhat known in that state as a writer of juvenile stories. It is rumored that the engagement was of many years standing. Both parties receive the warm congratulations of Mr. Cornman's many friends in this county."

"Now, Hulda, isn't this awful?"

But Hulda and Cis had both fled from the room and he was left laughing alone.

Mrs. Hardy had received a brief message from the teacher that he would arrive with his bride on New Year's day, and David had constituted himself a committee to arouse the entire town to the importance of the occasion.

It was decided to give him a reception, and that meant, that every one in town who felt an interest, men, women and children, would crowd into the little home that evening to see the bride, "have refreshments," and enjoy themselves in a social way.

The "refreshments," as a supper to be passed around was always called, sprang up like manna in the wilderness, and David was sent for from all over the town to carry the baskets to the cottage. It was holiday time and it was a matter of gratification to every one, that something had happened to give occasion for more local excitement and amusement.

But doing errands, blacking stoves, hanging pictures and sweeping garden walks, could not so entirely utilize David, but that he had time to make his presence felt.

While Hulda was rubbing the window-panes in the

dining-room till they shone like the clear, cold air outside, he was kneeling close by rubbing a chair with a bit of oil on a flannel.

Cis Beverly was by the little stove hushing Nonie to sleep. David thought he would abandon his teasing of Hulda for a while, and begin something else.

"Cis," he said, but not looking at her at all, "you make a tiptop nurse. You take to it like a pan to a pick and shovel. Now if that city fellow of yours could see you, he'd locate some rock and gravel and stay here."

"Oh, Dave, you are dreadful." Hulda turned upon him angrily, and threw her damp towel over his head. Then she dragged him blindfolded into the kitchen.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you rude man? You sha'n't tease that poor girl so. Say what you please to me, but let that poor girl alone."

"Nonsense, I said nothing to hurt her feelings," insisted David. "I was only experimenting a little on my own account."

"Then don't say such rude things," said the girl, soberly. A moment later Hulda found Cis in the bedroom bending a white face over the crib.

"Never mind, Cis," she said, "David didn't mean anything. He sha'n't speak so rudely to you again."

Cis did not look up or reply. Hulda pressed her hand gently, and went from the room.

When the stage drove up to the door that evening, the little house was full to overflowing. As David said, the parlor was full of "swells;" one or two mine owners, a store-keeper, the doctor, and the minister,

and their wives. A strong representation of Methodists filled the sitting-room; matrons with cakes in their hands crowded into the warm little kitchen, and the school-boys and girls filled the hall.

"I appreciate this little surprise. It is a most graceful compliment, I assure you," the tall teacher was saying to Mrs. Graceway at the door, while the pastor stood shaking the hand of Mrs. Cornman once and again. The first words she had spoken won the heart of the gray haired minister.

"I am glad to meet my pastor first," she had said. "I am a life-long Methodist."

She then removed her wraps, and in a neat bonnet and traveling dress, was introduced through the rooms by the delighted pastor.

Whatever Mrs. Cornman, who had come out to California to marry her old lover, now thought of him, it was evident that her old lover could not but be more than pleased with his bargain.

Hardup people were delighted. She was a valuable addition, and they all said so to each other as she moved out of hearing. A tall, well formed, healthy looking woman, with affable manners, and fine gray eyes. Her face showed culture, intelligence and strength of character.

She had a pleasant greeting for all, a word of wit here and there and a warm and patronizing manner for the children.

Exactly her equal had never before been seen in Hardup.

"She's all Boston," said a grizzly prospector,

proudly, who was known to have come from some where "along shore."

"She's a real, genuine New Yorker," said another, with a reflective air of knowing.

"She's too tony for these parts," whispered a young native son.

"I think she could superintend our Sunday School," said Mrs. Graceway to a stolid matron.

David pulled Hulda's sleeve in a corner of the hall.

"Never mind, Hulda," he whispered, insinuatingly, "cheer up! It's a fair beat. She takes the cake."

"Indeed she does," answered the girl warmly. "I think I shall like her ever so much. I am glad she has come."

Then she sighed so heavily, as she stood there, that David's attention was arrested, and he turned and scrutinized her face for a moment with attentive seriousness.

Had she really learned to like the teacher? But Hulda was thinking of Mrs. Cornman.

CHAPTER XIX.

DARK DAYS.

Spring came to the Placer regions like a festival of green and gold. The green grass spread out over the openings, and began to wave over the edges of the high red bluffs; the yellow buttercups appeared on the warm hill sides, heralding a fairer host, and the warm poppies trooped out aflame in the rich meadows.

The days were clear and shining, and the rocky slopes sparkled in the distance. The roads were firm and hard, the forests were new with budding verdure, the creeks and gulches ran foaming with spring freshets, and the cañons were odorous with blooming shrubs.

One Saturday, two horsemen were riding over the country between Forest Grove and Hardup. Wherever a tunnel, a line of sluice boxes, or a shaft and windlass, indicated mining operations, they left the road and made an examination of the property.

The elderly man, a well dressed portly, florid gentleman, was making a list of mining property for sale, and the younger man, who seemed to know the country and the people thoroughly, was showing him about and answering his questions.

Giving his evenings to reading law, and spending his days in the school-room, La Grange had found it quite advantageous to his health to spend his Saturdays in the open air. A real estate firm of Forest Grove were glad to employ a man of such superior talent to show strangers about the vicinity.

"All I want to do," said the elder man, as they rode along, "is to make sales. I've been doing a good business up around Grass Valley lately. You see I have a partner there, and I send up the victims from the city, mostly Easterners—not exactly victims, you know, for we agree to sell the mine for a man, if he don't like it. Then he's so anxious to get his money back that he turns in and helps me sell it, so we keep turning the same mine over and over. Now if you want to go in with me here, you can make something out of this, eh? A good chance for a young man like you. And if you know how to carry a little 'salt' around in your pocket, you can keep the ball rolling."

La Grange looked at the stranger furtively, and his face grew a shade graver.

"You see I don't want a Company. All I want is a man in good standing, like you, to do a little salting and talking, and keep mum. Too many spoils the game. I mean business now. What do you think?"

La Grange looked as if he were thinking a good deal, but he said nothing.

"You see," continued the florid gentleman, "you won't get into trouble, for all the kicking is done to us in the city, and if a man threatens to make trouble, I buy him out myself. But the majority of men

won't fight, you know. But it takes a woman to kick up the devil of a row, if she ain't treated just right. I'm a woman hater myself."

"Women are more honest than men," said La Grange.

"Not all of them. My partner in the city is a woman. She keeps a high class lodging house, and between us we take in the tenderfoots, I can tell you."

"Then you admit your business is not honest."

"Oh, no, not at all, I don't. We handle good property, and a man can take his choice. You can't help it, if people are fools. For instance, you tell me certain things about these mines. If I believe it all, are you to blame?"

La Grange turned squarely in his saddle.

"Hold on a minute, sir."

The stranger threw out his hand.

"No offense, no offense, I assure you. I said, for instance. Oh, you can't talk to me. I know all about mines."

La Grange scowled and drew his hat down over his eyes. He was getting an excellent antidote for his own diseases, and for a moment he felt the strong mental sickness of those who suddenly see their own follies.

The two men came into Hardup at noon and stopped for dinner at the principal hotel. After dinner they occupied two arm chairs on the shaded porch in front, while several idlers were occupying seats around them, smoking and chewing with apparent indifference, but in reality eagerly listening for every

word of gossip that might be current in the town and country.

"Well, what's the news down here?" said La Grange, patronizingly, to a thin, sallow little man on his right, a person named Bealy, who peddled apples in the summer season, and peddled as much gossip as he dared to, all the time.

Bealy laid down the county paper and yawned lazily.

"Oh, not much. Nothin' in particular. You heard the widow Hardy was dead."

"Why, no!"

"Died yesterday. Had pneumonia terrible! Buried Sunday, at one o'clock. Awful sudden death!"

"Well, well, I hadn't heard of that!"

"Yes, and I guess arter the funeral, they'll start up that old talk about that baby, for folks are bound to know the truth, you know."

La Grange, having no desire to encourage gossip, puiled his hat over his eyes and was silent.

Another gossip spoke up behind him.

"Oh, fiddle! I believe it was just as they said. It is some cousin's baby. You'd better shut your mouth. David Strong was blustering around here this morning, and he says he'll shoot the first man that says a word about the widow's daughter."

"He'd better shoot himself," said the first gossip. "Folks say it's his'n. All of a sudden the winter 'fore this, they had a baby there. The girl she went to the city and brung it back, said it was a cousin's, you know. Looks curious but of course I don't

know nothin' about it. But they say Hulda, that's the girl, don't care nothin' about it. Of course folks wouldn't talk if either of the women would tell anything. There's that Beverly girl—she done a pretty thing for a slip of a girl like her. When the widow died she bundled up the baby and took it home. She told around that if Hulda's cousin never came for the young one, she'd keep it."

La Grange rose and walked away, but with clenched hands and compressed lips; he would like to have knocked the apple peddler into the middle of the street. But it was clearly not his place, and would have occasioned more talk. He went around to the hotel stable and stood in the door with a very sad and grave expression on his face, while the horses were being saddled. The noblest and best woman he ever knew was in serious trouble, and he could do nothing to help her. Any bungling interference would only make matters worse. "Any way," he thought, "I can come to the funeral to-morrow, and show respect in that way."

When he came around to the front of the house the florid stranger was there alone conversing with the apple peddler, whose tongue was running freely; but he came immediately, and they mounted and rode out of town. La Grange was not in a talkative mood, and the stranger, after taking a cursory glance at the little Giant Mine near Hardup, said he would go back to Forest Grove.

Max Royse, mining sharp, real estate agent and general speculator, had lost his interest in the mines

around Hardup. He had discovered a mine that was loaded, and liable at any moment to explode about his feet. The evidence was all circumstantial, but if the girl, Hulda Hardy, had brought home an infant, if Cis Beverly was home and strangely interested in that infant, he preferred not to be around if any investigations were in progress. Then he began to suspect that there had been some flaw in the management of Mrs. Minerva Ellis.

Meanwhile all was dark and silent in the rooms of the Hardy cottage. Hulda's gentle, pure-minded, kind-hearted mother, her only one to love in the world, had passed away. David had come for her with a buggy to Cherry Valley—she had arrived just in time to see the last helpless, labored hours of her mother's life.

Mrs. Cornman was everything, and did everything. All that a skillful nurse could do she had done, and no one could be more wise, kind and helpful. She gave the stricken girl her seat by the bedside, and waited upon her with the most tender and watchful solicitation. But Hulda was slow to see the signs of death, and only near the last did she whisper anxiously when no one was near.

"Mother, mother, what shall I do about Nonie? Shall I tell?"

"Hulda, be kind—protect—be true b—e good,—"
came the labored answer with a pressure of the hand.

When it was all over Mrs Cornman had led the girl to her own room, while she established the order of sorrow in the little room.

At midnight Cis, who had been rocking Nonie in a corner of the kitchen, because there was no place to go with her, crept up the stairs, knocked at Hulda's door and went in with the child.

She locked the door, laid the sleeping babe on the bed, and turned to Hulda, sitting by the window.

Cis had been weeping all night; her old strength and courage were gone. She knew what she had lost. She knew that Hulda could not do as her mother had done. But Cis had resolved to throw herself on the large mercy of her young friend. She fell at her feet, clasped her waist, and with tears and sobs, told her the sad story of innocence, deceit, wrong and misery. She thought the affair of the basket, and how it had come to be in Hulda's room, had been some blunder of the Chinese servants; but the rest she told, just as it had happened, the true name of her betrayer and all. Hulda shuddered. "And oh, Hulda," she sobbed, "you and your mother have saved me. You kept my secret till I learned to live it down, and now it will ruin me to have it all come out. I want to live a good life. I want grandma to die happy, and oh, Hulda, you will save me, won't you? People think it is your cousin's baby. Let them think so always, and I will take Nonie home to take care of her, and you can come and live with us too, some, won't you? I was bad in my heart when I came home, Hulda, I was wicked; but you have been so noble and good, I want to be like you."

Hulda laid her own trembling arm around the girl.

"Cis, dear, why should I harm you? Take the

child; I never could love it, you know that, but I will protect you and save you. I promised my mother I would, and I will."

Then the fountains of her own grief were unsealed, and she broke down in tears and cries.

Later Mrs. Cornman, coming in to see what could be done for Hulda, found the girls weeping quietly, locked in each other's arms, and she was glad.

"Hulda is crying," she said to her husband. "I think she will be all right, now."

The funeral conducted by the Rev. Graceway was the most properly conducted funeral that had ever taken place in Hardup. Mrs. Cornman, whom every one loved and admired, gave all the directions, and in everything she was implicitly obeyed. She kept Hulda in strict retirement, as it seemed most proper in the case of an orphan girl. She saw no one but Cis, not even David, and she asked for no one. She entered the church dressed in deep black and heavily veiled, leaning on the arm of Mrs. Cornman; grandpa and grandma Beverly came next, and Mr. Cornman followed with Cis, also in black, but not veiled. David was one of the pall-bearers.

After the remains had been borne out of the church, Mrs. Cornman tarried a moment in the vestibule and allowed the friends to speak to Hulda as they passed out. A great many took her hand and tried to say a comforting word, but every word spoken swelled the burden on her heart, till she leaned on Mrs. Cornman and saw and heard nothing.

A young man, lingering behind the women and

girls came forward timidly and tried several times to speak to her. He offered his hand, but she made no sign of recognition, and looked straight before her. He would have assisted Mrs. Cornman to put her in the buggy, but she turned away. He stood and watched the procession move away, then sat on the church steps a while, very sad and evidently troubled; he afterward mounted his horse and rode towards Forest Grove.

The next day Hulda was Mrs. Cornman's only care. She was alone in the house with her, and gave her undivided attention to the stricken girl. She did not try to bring her out of her room, for the sight of the lonely rooms would be a new grief. She brought some tea and toast to her, gathered her a bunch of poppies in the orchard, then after she had read to her from her own well marked Bible, Hulda seemed comforted and held the hand of her new friend, and thanked her over and over for everything she had done.

"It was a pleasure to do for you," said Mrs. Cornman, "You have borne it beautifully, but there is one thing, you should have noticed the attentions of all the kind friends whether you liked them or not."

"Oh, I did," said Hulda.

"No, you was quite rude to one man. He was one of the last to speak to you at the church. You refused to speak to him or give him your hand."

"Who was he? I don't remember any man at the last."

"Didn't you see a nice looking young man, quite

handsome, offer you his hand several times just as we came out?"

"I didn't see any young man, Mrs. Cornman, what did he look like?"

"He was rather tall, with dark hair, and a strong, blue gray eye, and a dark mustache. He was well dressed, and did not look like a working man. He seemed hurt that you would not see him, and looked very sad. You shouldn't have treated any one so."

"Mrs. Cornman, I didn't see him, I know I didn't. It was very kind of him to come. Oh, Mrs. Cornman!"

She broke down and cried bitterly. Nothing could comfort her. In the afternoon Mrs. Cornman came up.

"There is a young woman here," she said, "and insists on seeing you. She doesn't give her name. See what she has brought."

She showed her a basket of the first strawberries of the year, packed in green leaves.

"I'm coming anyway," said a sweet voice on the stairs. "My dear, dear teacher, I had to come. You came to me once when I was in trouble." And Millie, fresh, sweet and loving, rushed into her arms and kissed her over and over again.

Simple, guileless, innocent and loving, Millie brought comfort to her teacher's heart. Hulda looked back through Millie's liquid blue eyes to the sweet days when Cherry Valley was her paradise, her hero walked before her sight unblemished as a god, and all was well with her life.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INQUISITION.

After the first burst of anger had exhausted itself, David took refuge in silence. Indeed he had been rather roughly reminded by a few that "the less said the better." Though resenting the implication of such remarks he recognized the wisdom and contained himself accordingly. But his kind heart was too deeply troubled to let the days pass away without doing something towards dispelling the ugly rumors that floated on the street.

He had no intention of having anything to say to Mrs. Cornman. Her general efficiency, precision and correct grammar subdued him thoroughly in her presence. He could think of only one person, to whom he was willing to speak on the subject. The Rev. Graceway would be a true friend to the bereaved girl, and would no doubt find a way to put an end to these rumors.

He knocked one evening at the outside door of the pastor's study, in the parsonage among the pines back of the church. The good pastor was surprised to see David standing in the full glow of his lamp, and he wondered if at last one of the many young men he prayed for, had not come to seek the way of salvation.

David sat down in the plain little room, twirled his hat on his hand, and blundered awkwardly, while the pastor listened with a pained face.

On hearing the short story he was greatly troubled. He begged to withdraw and speak to his wife about it. He went out of the room and was gone a long time. Upon his return his report was that there was only one thing to be done. Miss Hardy must be approached on the subject and be induced to tell the truth; and the truth as it was, he would circulate through the neighborhood. He had no doubt but that one word from the young lady would set matters in their right light.

David went away quite satisfied. He lit his lamp in his lonely cabin, and thought of poor Hulda, and all the charming graces Cis had displayed of late, crowned by the act of her having the care of an unknown child upon her young and inexperienced hands.

When the good pastor and his wife were preparing the next day to go to the Hardy cottage, Hulda herself came lightly onto the porch and rapped on the study door. Millie had staid with her one night and day, while Buck patiently lounged about the hotel. The next morning Hulda came down from her room determined to take up the burden of her sorrow as best she could.

After breakfast she had a talk with Mrs. Cornman. The teacher and his wife were glad to rent the cottage and furniture as it stood, leaving Hulda her little bedroom up-stairs where she might lock up her books and keepsakes, and special articles that were

dear to her. Mrs. Cornman was a very satisfactory person to deal with. She had even taken an inventory of the provisions in the house, and estimated that there was enough to pay Hulda's board for several weeks, if she wished to stay.

Hulda had covered her face with her black veil and went out of the house that was no longer hers. She went into the orchard, sweet with late blossoms. She had a plan of getting David to care for it; she could not bear the thought of its being neglected. She followed the orchard path, and went out into the grove of young pines. The path through the pines led to the old weather beaten church, and the low unpainted parsonage.

She was received by her good friends with a subdued kindness, appropriate to her affliction. The pastor's wife, a gentle little woman, who studiously echoed her husband, gave Hulda the best rocker, and sat down looking at her, quite at a loss for anything to say. She observed that the light was strong in her caller's eyes, and rose to adjust the curtain. Hulda turned to her pastor.

"I came in," she said, "to get you to do a little business for me, that I want to have done as soon as possible. Some time ago mother placed all her property in my name. We have, as you know, a thousand dollars in the bank, that the miners presented to my mother when father died. Now mother is gone and I am able to support myself, and I wish to return this money to the men who gave it. Some are dead, of course, and some cannot be found. I want

this balance to go to the church, and if all the people who first gave this money are willing, I would like to see it all go to start a fund for a new church. I do not feel that the money belongs to me. My house and orchard is much more valuable, than when father died, and I have no wish to keep the money anyway."

"You are a good girl, you are a good girl," cried the pastor's wife, clasping her hands in ecstasy. But the minister looked gravely at the girl.

"This is a very solemn step you are taking Miss Hardy. You need the money more than the church. You might wish to complete your education."

"It is not a question of need, Brother Graceway," interrupted Hulda.

"Ah, well," the minister rubbed his hands slowly, "we ought to take this under advisement."

"We will do nothing of the kind, Brother Graceway. I wish you to give out a notice. I have the original subscription list here. The people can come and get their money and then you can talk to them about the new church. Here is a check for the amount made out in your name. Please say no more. That is all I intend to do about it."

She rose hurriedly as if to go. The gentle little woman came and kissed her cheek.

"You are a noble girl. Some of those men are poor now. You are perfectly right." Hulda smiled and turned away. Mrs. Graceway bent over her husband who sat as if stupefied, the papers in his hand.

"Father, father, sha'n't we say something about the other now?"

“Er--r, yes, of course. Call her back.”

The woman took her hand quietly. “Wait a minute, Miss Hardy, there is something we want to say.”

Hulda sat down patiently, and looked as if she had no interest in what they wished to say.

“Ah, well, Miss Hardy,” the minister cleared his throat several times. “About the child, er—the child. Is its support assured?”

Hulda straightened up and opened her eyes wildly.

“What child?”

“Er—the child your mother raised. I speak of its support.”

“That child, Brother Graceway, is not an heir in any sense to this money. Her support any way is assured.”

“Ah, yes, yes. In addition, Miss Hardy, would you have any objection, Miss Hardy, to telling us something further about the child—its history and parentage. I ask as a friend, you know.”

Hulda started violently, and dropped her head on her clasped hands. Since her last conversation with La Grange she had thought much over the fact that although she had given up her lover because he seemed lacking in honor, yet for a year she had been living and telling a direct falsehood to shield a sufferer. Having taken such a bold stand against deceit, she dared not try to reconcile her own conduct to it. But she was not prepared with an answer to this question. It had not occurred to her, that the question would come up in the short time of her stay, before she would return to Cherry Creek.

But for the first flash of thought she was glad the question came from her good pastor. He was patient and kind, and he might not think it strange if he were not answered at all. So she finally lifted her head calmly.

"I am not at liberty just now to tell you anything about her, Brother Graceway."

Brother Graceway looked around at his wife, puzzled.

"We really want to know, Miss Hardy," she suggested. Hulda looked at her a little strangely.

"Yes," continued her pastor, "it is absolutely necessary that we should know the facts just as they are."

Hulda rose distressed, but as yet, calm.

"I am sorry, but there is nothing to tell. You must not ask me."

Her look of candor and innocence quelled the pastor into silence. She turned to go, but Mrs. Graceway came close and touched Hulda's arm quietly, and whispered:

"You must tell us, dear, for people say it is your child."

Hulda turned and faced them with a wild look in her eyes, and a blanched face.

"You see we ask for your good."

"Yes, yes," she murmured.

The pastor and his wife both continued to make kind and gentle remarks, but Hulda heard nothing.

Mother, home, friends, all gone. She began to tremble, then she threw up her hands as if for sup-

port, and knowing there was a lounge in the corner of the room she walked blindly to it, and dropped down with a burst of tears and sobs. All the efforts of Mrs. Graceway availed nothing. She neither spoke nor moved, but sobbed her strength away.

The good people were sorely distressed. At noon, Mrs. Graceway brought a cup of tea and persuaded her to sit up and drink it.

The pastor came and stood by her and spoke in the most kind and gentle manner.

"You see we want to break up the talk, that is why we ask."

The girl then lifted up her sad eyes.

"There is nothing to say. I cannot tell you. Oh, my friends, my friends, how can they say it?"

Presently she went away and walked, as one stunned, through the pines, and down the grassy orchard path, and came to her old home, which looked so utterly strange to her.

Mrs. Cornman had prepared a dainty lunch and kept it waiting for her after the teacher had gone back to school; but she saw the fixed look of pain on Hulda's face, and let her walk on without a word, to hide herself in her room.

Hulda came down later, and quietly helped about the evening meal, but she ate only a few mouthfuls, and Mrs. Cornman gently pressed her to go back to her room, as she saw that the girl gained better there than anywhere else.

That evening the Rev. and Mrs. Graceway called, and wished to see Mr. and Mrs. Cornman in the par-

lor. They state the case briefly and wished the teacher and his wife to use their influence to induce Hulda to explain the matter.

Joseph Cornman heard a few words, then quietly rose and left the room, and going out of the house he stumbled on David leaning over the front gate. He had determined in his own mind at once not to have any hand in the matter whatever. It did not trouble him to see the girl humiliated. He quite hated her now, for the temporary mental treason she caused him to have against that peerless and wonderful woman, his wife.

"Oh, is that you, Strong?"

They could barely see each other in the darkness.

"Has she told anything yet?" whispered David, huskily.

"Not that I know of," answered the teacher indifferently.

"I suppose you know the talk?"

"Oh, yes," with a circumflex.

David straightened up with rising anger.

"Cornman, do you think of such a thing as that girl's being guilty? Lord, if I thought you did, I'd knock you down—When you've been here all the time."

Mr. Cornman drew back. He seemed inclined to get into the shelter of the rosebush.

"Keep cool, keep cool. In any case, I am not the man to knock down." He laughed as if the matter was of no consequence.

"Bah." David walked down the lane to smother his anger.

The next morning Hulda came to breakfast, pale and quite, and Mrs. Cornman watched her furtively. After breakfast she said to her:

"This is going to be a lovely day, Hulda. Don't you feel like going with me for wild flowers? You know you promised to help me get a collection of all the flowers. I think you will feel stronger to go."

Hulda quietly assented. Getting shade hats and gloves, the two women went out through the orchard and pines, and followed a little stream that was finding its way down a gentle slope to the gulch below.

They gathered a few flowers languidly and sat down to rest on a flat boulder in the shade of some manzanita bushes. Hulda clasped her hands and looked down at the thin water purling over the rocks. There was no joy in anything, and she had determined to live out, as best she could, her period of dumb despair.

But Mrs. Cornman was only waiting to speak to her. She leaned closer to the girl's ear.

"Hulda, why do you try to bear it alone? Why don't you tell us?"

Hulda sat motionless.

"Aren't you willing to confide in me?" The girl turned a grateful face to her.

"If I could, Mrs. Cornman."

"But why can't you? You are injuring yourself not to tell."

"That makes no difference."

"But it is wrong."

"No matter."

Mrs. Cornman was silent a moment.

"But will you tell me one thing. Are you trying to shield a friend or relative?"

Hulda saw the trap at once. She could not shield a friend and tell of it. She turned away her face, and after a time said slowly.

"I have made up my mind not to say anything whatever, Mrs. Cornman."

"But do you want us to think you guilty?"

Hulda slowly dropped her face into her hands. Her tears were falling fast.

"There is nothing I want—but—my mother! My dear, dear mother!"

Mrs. Cornman had never met with an experience of this kind before. She did not know what to think, and in the absence of any proof she resolved to refrain from any judgment. But she knew that the majority would come to only one conclusion—that the girl was guilty.

"Very well, then," she said, after a time. "I shall not trouble you about it. But you must let me advise and help you. Don't you think I can?"

"O, yes, dear Mrs. Cornman." She bravely crushed back her tears. She wanted just such a friend; one wise in every way. She had always needed a friend like that. Mrs. Cornman acted from motives of pure generosity and charity. Her husband, knowing she would despise him if he did otherwise, did not condemn Hulda; but he had an acrid manner of avoiding the subject that jarred on his wife's nerves.

Hulda had grown stronger, and that same day when the shadows grew long, she dug out several small rosebushes and carried them alone to her mother's grave. David, who had gone there voluntarily to work about the graves of her two parents in the little enclosed lot, came out of the narrow space, and let her go in alone. But Hulda was quite cheerful.

"Thank you, thank you, David," she said, "this is just like you. Now can we plant these bushes?"

She held the plants while he placed the earth around them. She was perfectly firm and self-contained. She had reasoned that there was yet one, she wished to protect from unnecessary pain, and that one was the ever faithful and kind David. She knew that he must know of the scandal, and she had resolved to place him at his ease as far as his insight in regard to her own feelings were concerned.

After they had closed the picket gate, he walked home with her through the pines. David was glad she had returned her money to the donors, and wanted to tell her so.

"I heard you was a thousand dollars poorer," he said, "and I am tarnal glad of it."

"Why, Dave?"

"I'm glad you don't owe this miserable town a cent."

"Never mind, Dave, you know I don't care for the town. I am very happy in my school. I am going back there to-morrow. Millie and Buck are coming after me. Please don't worry about me, Dave. Nothing troubles me, but mother."

David looked at her in surprise, wondering at her indifference.

"Hulda, you don't know how lonely I'll be."

"Yes, Dave." They walked on with choked voices, their eyes filled with tears until they reached the orchard.

"Dave," she said, "you must go and see Cis sometimes, and be kind to her for my sake. Mother loved her, you know."

"Well, I will. It's my nature to want to be looking after somebody."

"Now, good-night, Dave, and come and say good-by in the morning."

But in the morning she went to the Beverly farm. She did not wish to see more of David then. In the interval Mrs. Cornman had told her of the implication of David's name in the town gossip, and she needed yet more strength in every way to give David a good assurance of her peace of mind. The slightest hint on her part, that she was being crushed by such unkind gossip, might start David into a series of aggressive blunders; such at least had been Mrs. Cornman's opinion, and Hulda was following her advice. Thus fortune at last had sent her a guide for her heedless footsteps.

Hulda was not happy in her school. The taste of classical studies she had received had destroyed her relish for the humdrum work of training the young children of Cherry Creek. The sorrow preyed upon her more when she realized that she could not numb her consciousness by the labors of her school-room work.

The sense of her utter loneliness grew heavier upon her. Her mother was gone, and with her, by a strange combination of circumstances, all the friends and hopes of her youth.

The practical and thoroughly useful Mrs. Cornman had not yet taken a place in the girl's heart to fill the place of those familiar faces of her earlier years. Every day deepened the sense of banishment and isolation from her old home. Reflection magnified the evils of her position in the eyes of the Hardup gossips, and she began to feel more heavily each day the burden of her supposed disgrace, and strange position. She reflected that they might in time hear of it at Cherry Creek, and the good people there would consider her unfit to instruct their tow-headed, bare-footed urchins, in the hot, unpainted school-house. The Woods, who were so gentle and kind to her since she wore her mourning dress, might then lose faith in her, and also cast her from their friendship.

Her cheeks grew paler as she pondered these things, yet in her heart there was no thought of wavering in her position in her loyalty to her mother's dying wish.

Harder than all to bear was the thought that La Grange would hear of it. She thought of the practical reflections that would arise in his strong mind. She had cast him away, made a wild lunge at the mote in his eye, while the beam in her own eye, the defect in her character had been unspeakably greater. He could only despise her, forget her, cease even to think of her, as unworthy of his memory.

She reflected that her apparent scorn of him at her mother's funeral, her unconscious refusal to speak to him, would only increase her present culpability in his opinion. It seemed to her that he would look upon that action as the pure audacity of guilt. She felt moreover, that the stain on her character effectually separated her from him. He was destined by his talents alone to take his place among the leading people, and, however worthy he might become of her, a woman with a blemished character should have no place with him. As she saw and felt her effectual separation from him for these reasons, she began to allow her mind to lose sight of the defect she had found in his character. As of one dead, she thought only of his virtues and magnified them. He became again in her mind and heart her candid book-laden lover of the past, and in love and memory of him, she tried to take comfort and solace from her books.

But that love, having no hope or promise at all, lay like a dead weight on her heart.

Meanwhile Hulda was tried in the town of Hardup by no jury, and acquitted by no judge. No one knew anything, yet everyone knew something. Those who did believe in the girl were silenced by her silence, and could have nothing to say. The influence of the Rev. Graceway was limited to the members of his flock, and these were not the ones who discussed the scandal, and some of them never heard of it.

Most of Hulda's money went to the church. A few accepted a return of the original gift, and so

many had died or gone away that most of the donors preferred to see their part swell the church building fund.

Those who believed in Hulda's guilt looked upon her return of the money as a proof of her guilt, considering that she had done it as a means of doing penance, or a means of softening the public judgment. Others, who were more pious than righteous, thought the church needed the money more than she did. Only a few were conscious of the true nobility of the deed. Among these was Mrs. Cornman, who placed an Easterner's estimate upon the value of money.

"Only think, Joseph," she said to her husband, one morning at breakfast, "she could have taken that money and left this ungrateful place, and gone to Vassar."

"Perhaps," suggested the teacher slowly, "perhaps her ambition does not aspire in that direction."

"Well, had I only known what she was thinking of, I would have sent her, ambition, money and all, straight East."

Mr. Cornman broke his toast into several pieces, and looked into his plate.

"Wait till you have had more experience with California girls, Mrs. Cornman," he said soberly.

As continued dropping wears away a stone, so the teacher by a lofty silence, or an appearance of conscientious non-committal, managed after a time to break up, somewhat, his wife's good opinion of Hulda. She concluded that discretion was the better part of valor in case anything should be wrong, and

although she determined to help and advise the girl all she could, yet she withheld the tender friendship and mother love she might have given her.

Soon after Hulda's return to her school, David in wrathful disgust packed his mule and returned to Juniper Gulch, from which, however, he felt inclined to return occasionally encouraged by the brighter smiles and kinder ways of pretty Cis Beverly. Cis was growing quite like herself again. She was becoming bright, winning and coquettish, as she used to be. She seldom left the little farm, however, giving her life to the care of the old folks and the child, that grew healthier and prettier, crowing in the sunshine, while Cis picked cherries or currants, or worked over her strawberry bed.

David soon began to come to spend his Sundays at the Beverly farm instead of going on to Hardup, and the feeble old people sitting in the vine shaded porch, smiled at each other to see him climb the cherry tree for Cis, or take the hoe, and change the water ditches in her garden.

The spring days were like lovely dreams, at this quiet little nook, where the forest-covered mountain had spread out a lap at its foot, wide enough for a house and orchard, and a little hay field.

The stony creek, with its diminishing summer stream, ran below, but sufficient spring-water came out of the mountain to make the orchard famous for its productiveness.

The spring air was rich with the melody of the birds, that flocked about the place and nested in the

vines over the house. The old fashioned flower garden was sweet with the perfume of the rose, the honey-suckle, the lemon verbena, mint and annis. Hollyhocks stood in a row by the gate, a pink oleander grew tall by the window. Bees, humming-birds and bumble-bees contested the ownership of the flower beds.

It was all very pleasant. David began to feel more and more at home, and the old people began to rely upon him as the natural staff of their old age.

Any hint of Hulda's ruined character never came into that bird-haunted little home. David naturally would not speak of it, Cis remained at home, and no one felt disposed to disturb the tranquil lives of the old people by such gossip.

On Sundays, when the old people felt particularly well, they would climb into the easy old buggy and go to church, but Cis preferred to stay at home with the child, and David always came in time to put out the old horse on their return. They brought news of the fine, new church, that would take the place of the old one, and Hulda's name was spoken with tender love by the old people; and Cis knelt sometimes by her white bed, and whispered it with welling tears of gratitude.

Such was the evolution of gentle Cis Beverly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SUMMER BOARDER.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Cornman had taken a summer boarder. She had a natural aversion to spending her time in idleness. She possessed a spare room, neatly furnished, and she very soon evolved the plan of taking a summer boarder to occupy it; one who, besides being a source of profit, might be companionable company. Her native ability suggested a plan of obtaining such a boarder. She wrote to the pastors of the leading churches in Sacramento, stating that she would open her pretty mountain home to some lady of refinement, who wished a good country boarding place. Her references being so good she at once received a reply from a woman, who was very glad to know of a home in just such a quiet mountain town. She came, and there was great mutual satisfaction.

She was a woman of about fifty years, with soft abundant gray hair, pretty blue eyes, refined manners and habits, and her clothes were rich in texture, and made with perfect taste.

Mrs. Cornman read aloud to her boarder from the papers and magazines, while they sat in the rose garden, with the roses hanging all about them.

"Oh, how I do enjoy this," said the boarder one day. "I like some one to read to me. I have had several young girls to come and live with me, but they hardly learned to read well before they were gone. Do you know, Mrs. Cornman, marriage is what girls think of most in this country? If I find a nice girl that I liked, I would give her a good education, and treat her as my own daughter, just to have her for a companion. My boy is away at school, and I am lonely."

Mrs. Cornman sat down that night and wrote to Hulda. She said:

"Come home next Friday if you can. I want you to get acquainted with my boarder. She is such a lovely woman, and I may get you something better to do than teaching a Third Grade country school. Come home."

The next Friday evening Hulda rode in on Lila. It was a sad ride for her. There were bitter-sweet memories at every turn. Lila thrust her nose into the old mossy log trough, and Hulda bent over her neck, with a sudden choking at her throat and a swift rush of tears.

Mrs. Cornman met her at the gate, kissed her warmly and gave her some tea on a shining white cloth in the dining-room.

Hulda went to her room and changed her habit for a soft black lawn dress, placed a cluster of Lady Banksia roses at her throat, and then Mrs. Cornman led her into her mother's old room where the gentle, white haired woman sat in the lamplight, which was softened by a pink shade.

"This is my orphan friend, Miss Hardy."

The woman was looking at her and smiling. She extended both her hands.

"Why, bless you, my child, I know you already! I have often thought of you. Don't you remember me? I met you at the Sacramento depot a year and a half ago."

The recognition was mutual. It was her companion on that fateful trip to San Francisco.

The next day Hulda took the garden hoe, and went out through the orchard, the pines, around the church, and parsonage to the graveyard on the hill. There would be thick weeds and grasses growing tall about the young rose-bushes by this time. The graveyard had been cleared from a thicket of scrub oaks and bushes. There had been some shapely wild bushes left in the cleared place. A great manzanita bush stood at the corner of the white picket railing of her lot.

She opened the low gate and sank down upon her knees with her hand full of roses from the cottage.

"My mother, my mother," she sobbed tremulously.

But there were no grasses or weeds there. The rose-bushes had opening buds on them, and the ground was clean and smooth. David had done everything.

While she was gone Mrs. Cornman thought it best to inform Mrs. Markham, her boarder, of the scandal that had made the death of the mother such a peculiarly sad loss to the girl. Mrs. Markham looked distressed, but there seemed to be no strong impression made on her mind.

"Oh, well," she said, "I am going to take the girl away from such ungrateful people, if she will go with me. She will get over her trouble sooner, too. You mustn't mind California gossip, Mrs. Cornman. When you have heard as much of it as I have, you will find that they forget it as quick as they take it up. If the girl wants to protect some friend, I say, let her alone."

Hulda went back to Cherry Valley* Sunday forenoon. She had no desire to go to church in Hardup, and her absence would be noted if she had remained at the cottage. She had decided to go with Mrs. Markham, who had promised her every educational advantage that Sacramento afforded, in return for her company. There was no doubt about the character and standing of Mrs. Markham. The pastor of the First M. E. Church in Sacramento had given her a letter of introduction to Mrs. Cornman, and Mrs. Cornman had known the pastor of the First M. E. Church in the East.

Mrs. Markham wished to return home in three weeks, and Hulda had promised to resign her position and go with her. She would miss the pleasant home with the Woods' family, and Lila, and the children of her school, who were now improving rapidly. But neither Mrs. Cornman or Mrs. Markham would listen to any refusal.

"It is the best chance a girl like you ever had," said Mrs. Cornman. "The rent of your house will clothe you, and more too, and she will furnish the rest. Don't think of refusing."

It was very quiet at the Woods' farmhouse when Hulda stopped Lila at the gate about noon. The children were at play far down in the orchard, and they did not see her. So she unsaddled Lila at the porch and led her to the barn, something she had never done before; there had always been some one to welcome and assist her. There was no one in the sitting-room, so she went into her room at the end of the porch. She changed her habit for a cool calico dress, and brushed and recoiled her hair. She turned to her book-stand to place her hand on the well worn Shakespeare La Grange had given her, and noticed for the first time an envelope lying there. It was addressed in a cramped, irregular penmanship, "Miss Hardy, Teacher." She opened it wonderingly. The writer or writers had made an illiterate attempt at a dignified communication!

To Miss Hardy, Teacher.

"Miss:—

"We held a school meeting to-day, and we elected new trustees. We, the undersigned trustees, think we had rather have a change of teachers, and we want you to resign at the end of your month in two weeks.

"J. BATES,

"R. GEDERS,

"P. MARKS,

"Trustees."

"Saturday, June 3rd, P. M."

Hulda laid down the paper and stood motionless. The last trial had come, in all ways the worst. The

scandal had reached Cherry Valley, and she was not considered fit to instruct the stupid little children of these uncultured parents. With a moan she fell across her bed clutching at the white counterpane, and lay motionless.

It must have been several hours after, when Mrs. Woods pushed open the door and came in. She saw the white face of the girl, who opened her eyes and looked at her without a word. Mrs. Woods had made the blow harder by not giving the girl any welcome at all on her return, and whatever may have been the cause of such neglect, she seemed repentant now. She threw herself on the bed and wound her arms about the stricken girl.

"I don't believe a word of it. Neither does anybody who's got any sense. Please don't feel so bad, Miss Hardy. Please don't look so."

This burst of sympathy brought the relief, and Hulda turned her face to the pillow with a flood of tears. Mrs. Woods sat and held her hand, and Hulda lay silent. Finally Mrs. Woods said:

"I have heard that you won't deny it. If the child isn't yours, why don't you say so?"

Hulda sat up rigidly and drew away. She then knew that this little friend who had been so kind, had in fact some doubt as to her innocence.

"Mrs. Woods, they didn't ask me to deny it. They asked me whose it was, and I refused to make any reply. Those people are crazy; they know it isn't mine."

"Well, there, I believe you," said Mrs. Woods,

slowly. "I am sorry the rumor came here; the trustees thought it was bad enough to have that kind of talk about, even if it was not true. I am sorry for you, especially since you feel so bad about it."

She smoothed Hulda's hand gently for a moment, then went suddenly out of the room. She had not tempered the pain in the least, and the girl knelt by her bed in prayerless despair, till Alex came tapping at her door to call her to evening tea.

But Monday morning little Susie Bates brought her a note that gave her more heartfelt pleasure than any grammatical communciation she had ever received. She kissed it and thrust it in her bosom. It brought back the sound of dancing on a pine platform, and the memory of a night ride through the forest.

"Dear old teacher:—

"Buck and me wants you to come to our house after school, and we'll hitch up and get your trunk. Buck says you sha'n't stay at anybody's else's house while you are here. Buck's mad enough. Now, please come, my dear old teacher.

"Millie Dorms."

So after dismissing her children, Hulda walked over the gravelly hills to a small, unpainted, new pine house on a slope by a wooded gulch. There was no fence and a line of white clothes hung in bold relief against the red background of the hill. Millie came out the open door and ran down to meet her. She was attired in a freshly ironed, wide muslin dress that made her look far too buncy; she was clean, and sweet as ever. She kissed Hulda and clung to her arm, leading her in.

"You will stay with us, won't you?" she said.

The front room was carpeted with a very red ingrain carpet, and furnished with a few pieces of cheap pine furniture; and the little bedroom had evidently shared its furniture with another sleeping room, but the walls were lined with white muslin, and Millie's frank hospitality made it a welcome and pleasant home to the heart-sick girl. She knew these simple-hearted friends trusted her without a question.

"Where's your husband?" she said, bathing her face in the water Millie had brought.

"Oh, he's out herding turkeys. He'll be here by the time I get supper. Won't you lie down on the lounge in the parlor and rest while I go out and get supper going?"

Hulda was glad to lie down, and listen to Millie stepping briskly around on the bare floor in the next room.

Presently Buck came and sat down in the doorway where he could see both the women. His wrath at the action of the new board had in no way subsided.

"It's the dirtiest piece of work I ever heard of. They're a blamed set of fools. They ain't got any more against you than you've got against my turkeys, not a bit. But old Pete Marks was up to Hardup, and he asked Cornman there if that darned story was true, and he couldn't get yes nor no out of that blamed rascal. He just twisted his greasy old shoulders. Oh, I didn't like that old injun the first time I saw him!"

"Buck, do hush!"

Millie came and wound her plump arm over his mouth, and Buck took it down and held it.

"What does that old Pete Marks know anyway? Why, he couldn't figger up the price of ten turkeys if they was worth a dollar apiece."

Hulda laughed then, and Millie took them in to supper. What an appetizing smell of steak, and what a great, mellow, crisp-looking jelly cake!

What with the well meant rude bluntness of Buck and the good cooking of Millie, Hulda did not fare so badly during the remainder of her time at Cherry Creek.

CHAPTER XXII.

CALLED AWAY TO A SURE PROOF.

On a mild, soft winter day in latter December of the same year, Hulda sat before an easel in the library room of Mrs. Markham's home in Sacramento. She was quietly dressed, though in richer material, than we have seen her wear on the rocky roads of the placer regions; and her hair was drawn back in the perfect Grecian coil, worn at that time, with soft curls around her neck and forehead. Her face lacked the old ruddy color, but it had gained in strength and grace of expression.

Back of her chair, where the sunlight shone full upon the slender figure, clad in gray silk, sat Mrs. Markham. She had a piece of gold colored velvet fastened on a frame in her hand, upon which she was working some design. But mostly the frame lay in her lap, and she was watching her companion.

Hulda was working on the finishing touches of a large panel painting of hollyhocks, in oil. She was working slowly, as an amateur works, leaning back occasionally and waiting for some criticism from Mrs. Markham.

"I am afraid, auntie," she said, "that they are not as good as my morning-glories."

They glanced at a canvas in the corner on which a mass of morning-glories were climbing over an adobe wall.

"They are both lovely," returned Mrs. Markham, "and Archie will be delighted with his Christmas presents."

"I wish I were sure he would be delighted with me."

"He will, dear. A girl who can learn to handle the brush as you have in six months, can make a school-boy like her."

"It isn't my talent, dear Mrs. Mrakham, it is the talent of the teacher you have employed for me."

Mrs. Mrakham smiled.

"Well, whose talent is it that has made you finish up a year's work in the High School in half a year?"

"Oh, I had had most of the studies except mathematics, before I came. Prof. Grey is a great demonstrator. It is only by his help that I will graduate in June."

"Prof. Grey is demonstrating one thing to me," said Mrs. Markham, emphatically.

"Auntie, don't be cross with him."

"Well, he is demonstrating to me that I shall have to put up my sign again. 'No proposals to my companion accepted.'"

Hulda bent closer to her work.

"But, auntie, you invite him here yourself. Why do you ask him to your Christmas dinner?"

"My Christmas dinner on the 24th?" laughed Mrs. Markham. "Well, there are a great many reasons.

I want to put you in the best society, even if I don't want you to marry. Then the dinner is for Archie, and I want him to know all my friends. He is only fifteen, but I want him to learn to feel as much at ease with the best people as he is with the boys at school. There dear, you have that light just right, don't put another touch of paint on that picture. It's just as lovely as it can be. Carry it up to your studio, Hulda, and bring down the ribbon; I want to see you begin on the dinner favors."

There were fifteen slips of satin ribbon to decorate with flowers, sprays and sentiments for Mrs. Markham's dinner, to be given on account of a pressure of events on the 24th.

The girl took the bright panel picture, shining against her dark dress, and left the room. She seemed to have grown taller, and her manners were graceful and quiet.

As she went out of the room, across the next room into the hall and up the stairs, her footsteps made no sound on the rich carpets. Mrs. Markham's home was everything that the taste of a wealthy woman could make it. The house had been originally a large square-built mansion, with French windows and blinds, a style of dwelling very much admired at the time of its erection, and Mrs. Markham, not wishing to materially change the home that was a memorial to her of her husband, had merely added to the original, modeling her improvements according to the best taste of the time.

The library was an addition with square bay win-

dows, and a tower like room above, opening upon an enclosed square balcony. This upper chamber was Hulda's room.

Her front parlor had been enlarged by a broad circular bay window, making above a pretty tower room and window where Mrs. Markham took her breakfast, and looked down upon her garden.

The square look of the house had been entirely relieved by the addition of gables and oriel windows, and well studied changes in the roof. The grounds were large and thickly planted with shrubbery, and there was a carriage drive through the grounds to the stable in the rear.

A large glass conservatory, full to the roof with plants, was a back wing of the house, connected with the dining-room by a covered passage.

The interior of the house had been changed and improved from year to year, and the furnishing showed choice selection from the various local epochs of modern taste.

But there was everywhere subdued, yet cheerful, coloring; the vases and bric-a-brac were choice and elegant, and engraving and etching mainly adorned the walls.

Mrs. Markham had been among the first to encourage an art interest in the city, and had placed Hulda under the best teacher the town afforded, as much perhaps to improve her own criticism, as to educate her talented protégé.

Archibald, her son, was fond of music, and when at home had been allowed to indulge his favorite in-

tellectual bias at will. The back parlor, or music room, contained a piano and organ; a violin, and a guitar stood in cases in the corner, but a flute and cornet had been surreptitiously carried away to school.

Brought into such rich and refining surroundings, the association alone would have been an education to the mountain girl. But Mrs. Markham, desiring to make her a companion in every way, had crowded the girl's mental capacity. So much had every moment been occupied, that Hulda had had little time to think of her lost home and friends.

As Christmas time drew near, Mrs. Markham had suggested a box of cigars for David Strong, and some toilet cases for Mrs. Cornman, and they had been duly purchased and sent off. Mrs. Markham insisted on paying for the pleasure of her suggestions.

On the evening of the 22nd, Archibald arrived, intent on making the most of a week's vacation. One could not help liking Archie. Round, wide blue eyes, an open countenance, vivacious manners, friendliness with every one—that was Archie Markham. He had become thoroughly acquainted, as he thought, with Hulda during his summer vacation, and now as soon as he had greeted his mother he ran up to Hulda's room, threw open the door, and embraced and kissed the astonished girl effusively.

"You dear old girl," he cried, "you've taken fine care of my pretty mamma. Say, can you play accompaniments yet? I know a daisy piece on the violin. It's awful easy, too. Come on, I want mamma to hear it."

"It will have to be awful easy, truly, if I play the accompaniment, but I'll try." And the two came down stairs arm in arm.

The dinner was just Archie's idea of a good time. Early on the morning of the 24th, he interviewed Ah Moon and found out of just what the dinner was to consist, and how it was to be served. Then Mike Donovan, the coachman, gardener and all around help, was subjected to a cross examination in the barn loft, and it was evolved that the carriage was to be sent for the minister and his wife, and an insurance man and wife, and the widow Crosby.

An hour before the time set for the guests to arrive he stood in the hall outside his mother's dressing room, where Hulda was putting the last touches to his mother's toilet. He was tapping on the door impatiently.

"I want to give you my presents now," he cried. "I am tired of packing them around."

Hulda went to her own room, and Mrs. Markham opened the door. She wore a black satin dress with an abundance of black lace, and her hair lay in shining silver puffs high on her head.

Archie kissed her affectionately. "You look stunning, mamma, I knew you would rather see my Christmas present now." He took an envelope from his pocket and unfolded some papers.

"They are my terms' reports, mamma. All ninety-five per cent."

"God bless you, my son," said the mother. "I know you have worked hard to get me this present.

Indeed you are right, I prize it more than anything you could buy for me. I want to show them to our pastor. But I hope you have something for Miss Hardy."

"Yes, mamma."

He took from his pocket a little box, and revealed a gold collar pin, with a row of pearls across it. Mrs. Markham examined it critically.

"That is in very good taste, Archie. It will harmonize with what I gave her. I have insisted upon her laying off her black dresses. I got her a silk dress and she will wear it to-day."

At that moment Hulda came out of her room. She wore a perfectly fitted navy blue silk dress made en-train, and with old-gold velvet panels, and vest.

"Glorious," cried the boy. "Why, Hulda, you're a long sight handsomer than I thought you was."

He fastened the pin at her throat and stood off to admire the effect. Hulda encircled Mrs. Markham's waist, her eyes shining with tears.

"You are both of you too kind," she stammered "I can never repay you."

The faint silver tones of a bell sounded through the hall. Archie was looking from the oriel window.

"It's Mike with the carriage full of preachers and church members," he said "Come on, now, and see me lay out my good behavior and grammar."

With smiles of amusement and pleasure, and the rustle of silken trains, the two women followed the boy down the broad stairs.

The guests at the dinner party were as various in

characteristics, as their names and appearances indicated.

There was Dr. Welcome, a widower, a portly man with a round, well colored face, who attached himself with a modulated flow of talk to Col. Bruner, a tall, graceful man with long, gray side whiskers, who took the opportunity to introduce his favorite theme, Life Insurance.

Lucy Welcome, a demure young lady with shining dark eyes, only thirteen years of age, crept into a chair behind her father, and did not speak till she was asked to go to the piano. Then she came out and played several difficult selections with wonderful skill, which explained her presence at the dinner party.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Gartner, who were very rich and very refined, and exceedingly quiet in their manners. Mrs. Gartner was popularly supposed to be intellectual, but Hulda never obtained her confidence sufficiently to find out upon what subjects her intellectuality expended itself. The Gartners were very religious people.

The widow was a cheerful little old lady, whose sterling qualities and fund of wit and humor made her as much sought after as a reigning belle. Archie was careful to reserve a seat for himself by her side.

The Rev. Henry Newcome was a host at entertaining, and went from one to another with ready speeches. Mrs. Newcome, a round faced little woman, with restless eyes that seemed to see everything came to Hulda, first with a compliment on her per-

sonal appearance, and then with a direct appeal that she should recite "Milton's Nativity" at the Church Christmas tree that evening.

She would take no refusal. "Mrs. Markham says you recite it," she said, "and we are determined to have it. There are so few who can recite it."

At a nod from Mrs. Markham, Hulda yielded. She had already agreed to recite the "Curfew Bells" at the high school party Christmas night. This popularity was not unpleasant to her.

"And after all," she thought, when she dared take the time to think, "it is just what La Grange would have liked me to be. My life can at least show him, that although I lack reputation and sense, yet I do not lack ambition."

In the meantime Archibald was entertaining the widow Crosby.

"I'll tell you just what our program is," he said. "To-night we are all going to the Christmas tree at the church. The carriage will bring mamma home early, and come back after Miss Hardy and me at twelve, or one o'clock, I guess. To-morrow morning early Miss Hardy and I are going in the carriage out to somewhere about 30th street, to take what's left of to-day's feast to a family out there, poor folks, you know. Then we are all going to the Christmas service at the Episcopal Church. And at two o'clock we go to dinner at the governor's house. The governor is an old friend of mamma's, you know."

"Then I have an invitation to the high school party. We're going to have a big day, don't you think?"

The faint tinkle of a bell announced that Ah Moon and his temporary assistant were ready to serve the guests.

"There now, Sister Crosby, if you'll let me help you, I'll take you in to dinner."

It was while the guests were going to the dining-room, that Hulda saw a telegraph messenger coming up the front steps. A moment after she was in the hall an open message in her hand. It was from Mrs. Cornman.

"Grandpa Beverly died last night. Mrs. Beverly is very low. Asks for you. Come."

It seemed like a message from another world. Why must she be called from these pleasures and comforts to the bedside of an old woman in the mountains? Then a rush of understanding came after her first startled thoughts. Of course, she was Cis Beverly's only protector and friend, and the poor girl would have to have her there in that time of bereavement and trouble. In truth she was Cis Beverly's protector, and that meant new responsibility and care.

Mrs. Markham came looking for her, and found her bowed over the telegram with strained, staring eyes.

She took the paper from her hand and read it, then placed her hand on Hulda's shoulder kindly but firmly.

"Of course you may go. That is settled. But you must not give away like this. These are only old friends of yours; you must make no difference before our guests. Now, Hulda, I'll tell you. You run out and see Mike. Tell him to go directly to the

depot and see if there is any night train you can go on. Then tell Moon to give you a little wine, and come to the dining-room. You must learn self-control among other things. Can you do it?"

"Yes, auntie," said the girl with a grateful clasp of her hand.

The dinner seemed like a dream to Hulda. Through the sparkle of glass, the shining of silver, the savory odors, the laughter and brilliant conversation, she seemed to see Cis Beverly with her child, waiting alone by the gate of the desolate farmhouse.

At six o'clock the excitement was all over, and she, with a dark dress and plain hat, was with Archie in the carriage at the depot, waiting for the express train.

As the train rolled over the long American river bridge, she lay back in her seat and abandoned herself to the sorrow of her thoughts. She was no longer the petted and admired plaything of Mrs. Markham. She was the sad-eyed Hulda Hardy, whom destiny had singled out for self sacrifice and not pleasure. There was only one thing to do. The conviction had come surely and clearly to her conscience. She would have to leave her new home with all its brilliant prospects, and go and live with Cis and care for her and protect her and Nonie. She pictured herself keeping the ditches around the orchard trees, and taking the eggs to market. Sometime Cis might marry and free her, but she shuddered at the thought; that must be prevented. Anyway it would leave Nonie with her.

Had there been any hesitation as to her duty the struggle would have been harder; but the conviction came so strong, that it was only after her plans had been made that she realized how hard it would be to go back and part with Mrs. Markham, and take her books and clothes from her pretty rooms in the square wing.

Late as it was, there was quite a crowd at the Forest Grove depot, and several people alighted with her from the train. She saw her old friend Hicks walking about, scrutinizing the arrivals. He passed her several times, then he turned and lifted his lantern to throw the light in her face.

"Cracky!" he exclaimed. "Who'd a thought this was you? What a tony cut you have got on you anyway! Why, you've grown a foot taller!"

Hulda took his hand, and reassured him by her smile, that she was something like her old self. She followed him to the corner of the platform.

"Now," he said, "I'll tell you just how it is. I'm up here with a light rig and a span of horses, and I've got to go down to Hardup to-night to make my regular trip to-morrow. They'll be a lot of travel. Now if you're afraid to go over the road after dark, you can stay and get a horse and saddle at daylight, and get down there pretty near as quick."

"Why, Hicks," cried the girl. "What are you talking about? Me to be afraid after dark? I guess you have forgotten what kind of a girl I am. Of course I'll go with you."

"Well," said Hicks, "got any luggage?"

"No, only my handbag. I will go with you to the stable."

They went along the dark, quiet street by the light of the lantern, and came to the stables where there was a pair of rough-looking mountain ponies harnessed to a light buckboard.

"You see," said the stage driver, as they drove out of town, "we've had about three inches of rain, and the roads are lightening in some places. It's bad enough by daylight. But I made my trips yesterday and I expect to make 'em to-morrow."

"Hicks," said Hulda, suddenly, "who sent you up here on this extra trip for me?"

"Well, you see, it was that Mrs. Aurelia, Stalker, Hawthorne, Cornman, whatever it is the newspapers call her, but I guess it's Strong puts up for it. The Cornmans ain't noted for prodigality. Nice folks, though. You see I took that telegram up this morning, and they looked for you on the afternoon train, but there was some poles down and the lightening wasn't hitched up in time. When I got into Hardup, after dark, too, there was Mrs. Cornman at the stables ordering me to come right back to the midnight express."

"Why, Hicks," exclaimed Hulda, "I am so sorry. You won't get any rest at all. Couldn't Dave have sent some one in your place?"

He cracked his whip violently, and was silent a moment.

"I guess you have forgotten old Hicks, haven't you?"

Hulda laughed. "No, why?"

"There was half a dozen I might have sent, but I wasn't going to risk your neck on these roads with a fool driver, to say nothing of my horses. I tell you these roads is a terror. There's a hole down there deep enough to drown a horse in, and the road's caved off in lots of places so that I have to cut out the bank with the hub to scrape along."

The veteran stage driver splashed along through the mud in the darkness, apparently in utter disregard of life or danger, but Hulda knew she was as safe as if Mike Donovan were driving her with the Markham carriage in the park at Sacramento.

The moon came out clear from some flying clouds and they could see the road better. Suddenly he drew the horses to a standstill with a loud exclamation.

"Cain and Abel! What's this? Take the lines a minute."

He sprang out and went forward. Hulda waited in suspense, hearing men's voices; then Hicks came trudging back, muttering and gesticulating.

"Here's a rum go," he said to the girl. "There's a fellow going into the Little Giant Mine with a load of quicksilver. He's got a horse and a wheel mired. He's half drunk—been tied up to some dead fall instead of getting in before dark. You better curl up in the robes and go to sleep, girl. It'll take me two hours to get him out of the road."

Hulda concluded to make the best of a bad matter. She crouched down in front of the buggy, drew the

robes over her and tried vainly to sleep, her head resting on the seat, and the west wind blowing gustily about her. Her thoughts were back on that snowy ride of just a year ago. It was daylight when they drove into Hardup.

"Now," said Hicks, "you come to the hotel with me and get some coffee. Then I'll have Pete, the stable boy, take this rig and drive you out to the Beverly farm. I've got to be getting ready to go back."

Hulda came up the path of the bare, wind blown garden in front of the Beverly home with rapid steps. She prayed that she might not be too late, if there was anything she could say or do to comfort the dying woman. A number of people stood on the porch in front, as if they had just come out to get the fresh air, or possibly speak more freely with each other. Hulda knew them all at a distance.

There was Dr. Rider, a silent, austere man who had grown old in the service of the mountain people. He wore his hat and overcoat and was drawing on his gloves. The Rev. Graceway stood at one side, speaking with his wife. Several neighbors were speaking with Mrs. Cornman, who, at a gesture from some one, turned, and seeing Hulda, came down the steps to meet her with outstretched hands. All were in hearing of her words.

"The dear old lady has just passed away," she said. "She thought she would live to see you, and we all thought so. But she failed after midnight, and we dared not wait for you any longer. So while she

was yet conscious, David and Cis were married, and she—”

Hulda stood back aghast. “David married to Cis?” she stammered. Then she threw up her hand with a cry. “Oh, David, David!” and sank, almost unconscious, with Mrs. Cornman’s arms about her.

All the by-standers were within hearing of her words, but none of them knew that she had been overstudying for five months, and that she was exhausted with her night’s ride and exposure, nor could they have any comprehension of the reason why the news of the marriage was such a shock to the girl’s mind. Nor is it any wonder that they misconstrued the scene to Hulda’s disadvantage, and misunderstood the cause of her emotion. It seemed to some of them a sure and final proof that Hulda Hardy was the deceived girl, and that David Strong should have married her.

The doctor bent over the drooping girl.

“It is nothing,” he said, “just loosen her coat and collar. She will be all right in a moment.”

Then Hulda opened her eyes and smiled a little, extending her hand in greeting to the minister. Cis appeared, and came to her with encircling arms. She led Hulda straight to her own little room at the far end of the house. She closed the door and threw her arms around her ever faithful friend.

“Oh, Hulda,” she whispered, pleadingly, “you won’t tell David, will you? I don’t want him to know. I love him and he loves me.”

Hulda sat down with Cis in her arms, and silently

stroked her fair curling hair. That sweet confession was pleading with her reason. Love could make amends for anything, and if she loved him, David was not wronged.

"Do you love him better than any one, Cis, and will you be true to him?"

"Yes, Hulda, yes, yes. And you will never, never tell him, will you? I will keep Nonie."

Then in the house of death Hulda kissed her trembling friend and promised her. "And it is Christmas day," thought the sweet-hearted girl. "It can be my Christmas gift, the best I ever gave. For Christ's sake, and mother's, I will keep my promise."

And it was only after she had lain down that night in her room in her own house at Hardup, that the after reflection came to her, that this marriage had relieved her of her self-assumed responsibility, and left her care free.

Mrs. Cornman, who was so superior at managing, brought young Mrs. Strong and the child to the Hardy cottage from the funeral, and Hulda and Cis were together for a week. David remained at the farmhouse to have it thoroughly aired, cleansed and repapered before Cis should return as his bride. And Hulda and Cis, walking in the pine forest, or whispering in the little bedroom up-stairs, planned more fully the details of the deception they had undertaken to carry out. People were to understand, and David also, that the child's mother died in the city, as had been affirmed before, and now it could be further told that the father was missing and did not

reply to any letters. It was a clear case of heartless desertion. This fabrication would be sufficient for David, and Cis knew that he would have no objection to her keeping the child as her own. He had said as much.

“Any way,” said Cis, who was more world-wise than Hulda, “the home is mine, and the orchard, and he dare not object.”

This fabrication proved to be sufficient for David; and as for the town’s people in general, they had their peculiar opinion of the whole affair. It was supposed that Cis really believed the story she told, and no one wished to try to make her any the wiser. They thought it a bit of crude justice that the child had found its father, even if its mother had disowned and discarded it.

On New Year’s day Mr. and Mrs. Cornman went away for the day; David came, and it seemed quite like old times that Hulda should put on one of her old work aprons, and serve the dinner that Mrs. Cornman had left prepared. But it was only seeming. She tried to make it pleasant, but she now realized that the old trouble still divided her from the Hardup friends, and she would rather have been in her new home in the Capital City. David was changed in every way for the better. A lively ambition seemed to have taken the place of his old idle humor. He had the most tender and wise solicitations for the comfort of Cis, and insisted upon her remaining away another week that he might the more thoroughly remove the traces of sickness and death

from the house. He told them for the first time about his mine at Juniper Gulch, and explained in detail his plans for working it in the spring.

He had also managed Hulda's property in a manner most satisfactory. The fruit from the orchard had never been marketed before; but he had sold it all at Forest Grove this summer, and realized enough from it to pay for the headstones and the improvements at the graveyard lot. He suggested to Hulda that he could have more fruit trees set out in the spring, and enhance the value of the property. But when he proposed setting the fence back and clearing up some of the pine forest, Hulda turned away and said slowly:

"No, Dave, let my pines alone."

In the morning David came for her with the light rig and horses, and took her to Forest Grove. She wanted to return at once, for Archie would be going back to San Jose. David wished her to go with him to several stores in Forest Grove, to select some carpets for the farmhouse, and she was glad to do this for him. She had come to know a great deal about such things.

La Grange, incidentally passing, saw her standing reflectively over a roll of carpet and he passed and repassed the open store several times. He stepped out of sight, however, when they came onto the street. He had a curiosity to see her, she had such a stylish appearance. But she had refused to speak to him at her mother's funeral, and might do so again. Besides the apple peddler had been around with the

revivified story, and this time with rather convincing proof; proof of one thing at least, that there had been some prior attachment between the widow Hardy's daughter and David Strong.

Hulda, from the car window, saw La Grange step onto the platform with a handful of letters, and pass to the mail car. He too, seemed taller, and he held his handsome head high, in the same proud and self-reliant manner as of old.

As the train glided out of the town, past the scattered houses and the green hills fringed with pines, Hulda felt for a moment as if she had suddenly stepped into a new world, and it was all darkness around her. Unawares the old pain that she had hoped to deaden with new thoughts sprang up anew. If she could only have gotten away without a glimpse of that fine erect figure, and well set head; but to see him even for a moment darkened all the future. She closed her eyes and sat as one stricken, but after a time it seemed as if some one had kissed her brow, and a strange comfort stole over her heart, as a sweet vision came to her eyes. It was the tender face of her beloved new mother, Mrs. Markham.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PICTURE.

For some time after the visit to Hardup, Hulda seemed so unlike herself that Mrs. Markham concluded that it would be best, if possible, to keep her away from her mountain associates. She seemed utterly dispirited for a time, and her spells of absent mindedness and sadness seemed incompatible with the event of the death of two aged people and the very satisfactory marriage of a young friend.

Mrs. Markham did not wish Hulda to forget her mother and her old home, but she wished her to rise to an appreciation of her present advantages. One day she said to her:

"I think I will not call you Hulda any more. I shall call you Dacie. Dacie is a pretty diminutive of Hulda, and it will not make you think of those who have always called you Hulda."

The girl smiled gratefully to her. "Yes, dear Auntie, call me Dacie. I shall like that very much. That was my father's name for me."

Dacie Hardy, as Mrs. Markham would have her called, graduated from the High School that Spring, and after Archibald had come home for his summer

vacation, and gone back, Mrs. Markham took Hulda and went to San Francisco for the remainder of the year, where her companion and protégé resumed her studies in painting and elocution. And a polite and smiling Frenchman came to their apartments several times a week to instruct them in his native language. Besides, there were the theatres and concerts; Mrs. Markham let nothing good escape her notice, and Hulda expanded in her new world, improved with every intellectual contact, and became all and more than all that Mrs. Markham had wished for her.

They returned to the Sacramento home for Archie's home coming again, and the Christmas dinner that Mrs. Markham gave was more elegant in appointments and brilliant in intellectual presence than any she had before given. Her protégé had become an attraction, and for this reason, and on account of her own personality, aided by her wealth, she could gather around her those of the best society, or those who, for any reason were desirable or entertaining.

The following summer, as soon as Archie's college term closed, in company with her son and Hulda, she went East on a leisurely pleasure trip. They visited Washington and New York, and when Archie had returned to his college opening, Mrs. Markham settled herself in Boston, for she was desirous that her ward, as she liked to call Hulda, where no one knew the difference, should do some painting in the studio of some artist of acknowledged standing.

Hulda liked Boston from the first, and she thoroughly loved her work, and soon felt as much at

home in the gray old streets going and returning from her studio work, as she once had felt in the rain-washed pine thickets of Hardup.

One day Hulda went to the studio in considerable perplexity. Mrs. Markham had conceived a new idea.

"Dacie, you must paint a California picture," she had said, and the fact that Hulda had no California sketches of her own, had had no weight in combating the new idea. So Hulda, desirous always of pleasing her, presented the matter to the artist, in whose fertility of invention she had much confidence.

Alfred Hoffner watched the clear-eyed girl over his pupils' easels for several hours, and then, coming to her side, he said:

"I have a friend who has a portfolio of California sketches; perhaps he will favor you. I will go with you to his studio to-morrow, and we will see what we can do."

Hulda was very happy over the portfolio of sketches, and the two artists stood gravely over her, listening to her strong criticism and exclamations of delight.

Suddenly she gave a little start and turned her face to the window and the great church spire outlined against the sky, for her eyes at once were full of tears, and the perfectly gloved hand holding the picture trembled visibly.

Alfred Hoffner came and looked over her shoulder. It was a study of pines and madroñes, with a red bank and a rocky road in the foreground. A rabbit

drank from a stream that ran across the road, and a mist, like snow, seemed to be whirling through the tree tops.

"That would be very difficult for you," said Alfred Hoffner, "besides, it is what I call a melancholy picture—it is cold."

"No matter," said the girl rising with the picture still in her hand, "let me try it. I know of places in the mountains just like that."

Walter Burleigh, the fellow artist, was of the opinion that the young lady had made a good selection.

"Particularly," he said with a glance at the girl, that seemed to her like a bow, "if the scene is familiar to her. But the canvas is too small for the subject. She might enlarge it and place in some figures. That is the way I intend to produce it. I found it one snowy afternoon about three years ago, in the lower Placer regions. Two young people came by on horseback as I was coming away."

Hulda turned to go; she seemed in haste.

"Miss Hardy," said Alfred Hoffner, as they were going down in the elevator, "would you like to come here and do that picture?"

"No, no," she said hastily, "I had rather stay with you. You are very kind to get it for me."

And Alfred Hoffner thought her a singularly interesting girl. This interest in her deepened as she worked under his eye over the shadowy pine solitude with the faint touches of snow on the broad branches of the madrones.

Hulda was no longer in Boston, the petted com-

panion of a rich woman, surrounded by everything that could contribute to her education and refine her tastes, but she was back on the rocky red roads of the placer regions, with her proud lover by her side; and, with the old sweet warmth, her heart stirred and throbbed under its wrappings of velvet and fur.

Mrs. Markham was indisposed, and could not go to the studio to watch the progress of the picture as she would have desired, and Hulda worked on as in a dream.

She was in a new, strange world. Was not the past divided from her forever? Who would ever know or dream that it was the tragedy of her heart that she was outlining under the shadows of the trees? A young woman on a bay horse started away, looking back from the shadow of a pine, while a young man was about to mount a large gray horse; and an expression of pain grew on both faces as the girl's brush hovered over them.

Alfred Hoffner stood behind her chair and did not break her abstraction. Her composition was truly wonderful. She had already penciled the name on the back of the canvas "L'adieu."

The artist called on Mrs. Markham at her apartment in the Roslyn. He wanted the picture to remain in Boston that winter to be placed on exhibition, but Mrs. Markham shook her head. She was about to return to her home, and she wanted her ward's best work to be hanging in her own parlor for the amusement of her own winter guests.

"Outside of the Crocker gallery," she said, "it will be the best picture in Sacramento."

Hoffner packed the picture for shipping and then returned to the Roslyn. When he came to the Pacific coast in the spring, he wished to call and see the picture, and its fair author. But Mrs. Markham and her ward had gone.

When the coachman was helping Hulda unpack the picture in the hall of Mrs. Markham's mansion in Sacramento, a flood of misgivings rushed in on the girl's mind. She wished the picture could have remained in Boston; any way, perhaps she could prevail upon her friend to hang it somewhere up-stairs, where every one could not see it. But Mrs. Markham was then in the library waiting impatiently to see the picture, so she directed Donovan to carry it in, and came behind, lingeringly.

Mrs. Markham was leaning back in a great easy chair, and the picture was placed where the full light of the bay window shone upon it. She sat silently regarding it for some time, while Hulda stood motionless by the door.

"Dacie."

As Hulda advanced she saw that her dear friend's eyes were full of tears, and there was a perceptible quivering about the mouth. She stretched out her hand mutely, and Hulda came and knelt on a hassock at her side, and the elderly woman drew the girl's face to her shoulder.

"Dacie," she said lovingly, "why is it that you always do everything to make me love you more and more. In some way you seem to belong to my life. I felt it as soon as I saw you at Hardup. Now tell

me, dear, won't you, how you came to get that figure of the young man, and the face?"

Hulda was weeping. Mrs. Markham was so tender and gentle she could not help it. She loved Mrs. Markham very dearly, but there was a sacred picture on her heart that was dearer. She was silent.

"Did it come to you, Dacie, like an inspiration?"

"Yes, Auntie, it came to me," said the girl. It was a deception, yet in one way it was the truth.

"Then it must have come to you in some mysterious way out of my mind, for a form like that, and a face some like that, is always before me. Dacie, the young man you have painted reminds me so much of my first husband. Dear, it may be wrong, but I loved him more than I did Archie's father. It may be wrong but there is a reason. Sometime I will tell you all about it. But this is a very, very strange circumstance. Perhaps, Dacie, if you don't care, I will hang the picture up-stairs, for it seems to me I shouldn't want everybody passing remarks about it."

Hulda kissed her white brow. The picture was also sacred to her.

The two women had been so busy settling themselves at home, and unpacking and arranging all the souvenirs of their travels, that they had not taken cognizance of the fact that the legislature had opened, and that the city was waking up to the usual excitements and festivities of the legislature winter. The next morning, however, brought a formal and especial invitation from Mrs. Col. Bruen that they should attend a little reception at her home that night.

"I shall not go," said Mrs. Markham at breakfast in her room in the tower wing. "I am not well enough. But you must go, Dacie, and we will unpack our dresses to-day, and find you something to wear."

It would have pleased Hulda better to have spent the day in some other manner; she wanted to write to Mrs. Cornman and Cis; it had been several months since she had heard from them, and she had promised to write them as soon as she returned. But Mrs. Markham willed otherwise. Col. Bruen and his wife had never failed to be in her parlors when invited there, and if Mrs. Bruen was to open her house for a reception, she wanted to show all due respect.

"It is probably some kind of a political move," she said to Hulda, while they were at work with the dresses. "Col. Bruen always consolidates business with pleasure, and you will probably meet some of the legislature people there. I want you to wear my diamonds, Dacie, I shall not go out much this winter, anyway."

"Auntie," resumed the girl after a time, "do you think I am likely to meet Willie Dudley there? I shall not know what to say to him."

Mrs. Markham leaned back in her rocker and tried to speak sternly.

"Well, Dacie, after all the training I have given you, I am sorry if you cannot conduct yourself properly under such circumstances. It was not your fault that the young fellow came on to Boston to propose to you, and came back disappointed. You don't regret it, do you, Dacie?"

"Oh, dear, no!" cried the girl honestly.

"Then, dear, you must meet him just as if he were an old acquaintance, and you must show no emotion or consciousness whatever. Take pains to treat him well and put him at his ease before others, and be sure and not make any opening for another overture. I presume you will have several rejected lovers before the season is out, and you must learn to treat them just as you do other people."

Hulda smiled quietly

"But then, if your own heart gets affected, you must let me know."

"Which is not likely," said the girl laughing. "I wouldn't marry, even to please you."

"And it would never please me," sighed Mrs. Markham, with a touch of sadness in her manner, "unless—unless—my boy—Oh, Dacio, let's talk about something else."

Colonel Bruen had taken one of the largest houses for rental in the city, and had thrown open the entire ground floor for his first reception. The guests were largely of his own choosing, with his wife's active co-operation. They were disappointed not to have Mrs. Markham, for she was a person of much influence, but the Markham carriage at the door, and the presence of the stylish and talented Miss Hardy, was a great deal.

Mrs. Bruen brought her downstairs from the dressing room, with a smile of satisfaction. The very person she wanted came forward.

"Ah, Mr. Dudley, will you take Miss Hardy into

the front parlor and introduce her to some of the new people you know?" Then she called him back.

"And, say. Introduce her as Miss Markham. Most of them will never know the difference, and it will be better for the colonel, you know."

Willie Dudley did not care. Anything was satisfactory to him, under the circumstances. Miss Hardy was so provokingly cool, and agreeable. He had never seen her so strikingly handsome and self-possessed. She wore a soft-black lace dress, with her white arms gleaming from the drapery, and five large diamonds sparkled at her throat and in her ears. She held a large pink feathery fan, and a fragrant cluster of heliotrope blossoms rose and fell on her bosom.

"I'd just like to see some other young fellow as miserable as I am," thought the unhappy Dudley.

So he introduced her to a gray-haired, abstracted senator, from Southern California, and went in search of his victim.

The victim was at hand willing to be introduced to a certain beautiful Miss Dacie Markham. Willie Dudley touched her arm.

"I want to present one of the brilliant young assemblymen from the mountains."

She moved slightly. She was listening to something the senator was saying about oranges.

"Miss Markham, permit me to introduce Mr. Edward La Grange."

Willie Dudley had performed his duty and gone. A beautiful woman stood strangely pale and still, and



“ Both were dumb—motionless.”

David of Juniper Gulch.

her fan lay at the feet of the tall young man, who had arrested his formal bow, and had thrown his head back in the old defiant way. Both were dumb, motionless and petrified from the surprise and revelations of the moment. Hulda recovered herself first, at least partially. Mrs. Markham's instructions were still fresh in her mind. "Do not show any emotion; treat him just as you do other people." Then came a wild beating at her heart, and a trivial thought became uppermost in her mind—her fan. How should she recover her fan? La Grange would never pick it up with that set, proud look on his face.

But the gray-haired senator picked it up, placed it in her hand, bowed and turned away. This brought La Grange to his senses. Was he not before the public eye every moment? His own position demanded everything that was gentlemanly and courteous in his outward appearance. He bowed stiffly, and then extended his hand.

"It gives me great pleasure to meet you again, especially under such favorable circumstances, Miss, Ah—"

"Miss Hardy, please," she said, her eyes flashing now. "Mr. Dudley had no authority from me to change my name. But I did not know you were here or even in town."

She gave him the tip of her fingers, and both perfectly cool and collected now, were silent for some moments, as if, being newly introduced they were at loss for something to say. When she spoke it was with the same audaciously charming manner that Willie Dudley had found so oppressive.

"And so you are one of our legislators, Mr. La Grange. I am glad to know of your success. Your constituents are to be congratulated, Mr. La Grange."

He also brought to his aid his usual self-possessed personality.

"You do not read the papers very closely, Miss Hardy."

"But you must excuse my ignorance. We have been away six months, and are just from Boston. Tell me all about it, Mr. La Grange."

"Wouldn't it amuse you, Miss Hardy, to know that I ran against your old friend Mr. Cornman, and beat him against the popular party?"

A burst of girlish laughter rang through the room, and attracted the momentary attention of several groups. Then she flushed with something like the old red roses in her cheeks, and he enjoyed her confusion.

"I think I owe a great many votes to your friend David Strong." He noted that she only smiled a little with mention of the name. "He worked right and left for me in his party, though I do not see why he should be opposed to Cornman, and I don't know why he should work for me, either. Mr. Strong is a man of considerable influence too. He is making money, doubtless that helps some, but Strong is a good fellow."

"Yes, I think he is a good man," she said simply. "How is he making money?"

"He has a very good mine in some mysterious place, I believe, called Juniper Gulch. We might see him down here this winter."

"I beg pardon, Miss Dacie," Mrs. Bruen was at her elbow, "but I wish to introduce Mr. La Grange to some San Francisco people, if you will excuse him for a moment."

Miss Hardy smiled a gracious assent, La Grange bowed and the ordeal was over.

Shortly after, Mrs. Bruen was summoned to the dressing room by one of the attendants. Miss Hardy was putting on her wraps and wished to be excused. She seemed quite ill, so Mrs. Bruen thought. She excused her with many regrets, and the carriage was called. And Hulda went home, and, pale and trembling, knelt by Mrs. Markham's couch, and begged that she might be allowed to share her winter's retirement.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Markham, "I shall get a maid to take care of you, if you come home sick again. But, stay at home? Never. I can't allow that."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE CHILD IS MINE."

For a week or two after this it seemed to Hulda that she could go nowhere, but that La Grange was there, the most prominent object before her eyes. They were introduced over and over again by well meaning friends. A perfect system of polite civilities existed between them. Each saw the other's popularity, and each was determined to lose no footing by ignoring it. For the sake of social pre-eminence they ignored any previous acquaintance, and treated each other publicly with marked deference, and they walked, sat and talked together with smiles, speaking of generalities in brilliant bits of conversation.

After several meetings of this kind there came to Hulda's relief a feeling something like hatred and scorn. After all he was nothing to her, and she was glad of it. He was a selfish, ambitious man; he loved no one but himself. This new feeling afforded a certain kind of relief.

But her Hardup friends, with their reminders of her simple but troubled girlhood, seemed to be gathering about her.

Mrs. Markham received a note from Mrs. Cornman. She and her husband were coming to the capital city

to spend a week. Mrs. Markham immediately wrote, inviting them to her house for dinner and the evening, upon a certain day. She anticipated great pleasure in showing them the improvements she had made upon the simple country school-teacher, whom she had taken to her home two and a half years previous.

And Mrs. Cornman appreciated it all, and was as proud as if she herself had been the sole cause of the girl's good fortune. She was full of her own life and interests as usual. Mr. Cornman had grown younger, seemingly.

The sweet-heart of his boyhood had become the guiding star of his life. She brought forward the best in him, and stimulated him to his greatest efforts. He carried himself with more ease and dignity, and his appearance was still further improved by a suit of superior fineness and finish, such as he had not possessed before the rule of Aurelia Cornman.

They were not at all discomfited by his political defeat. He had had to run against a practicing lawyer, and the most popular man in the county, explained Mrs. Cornman. La Grange was a rising man, and a thoroughly good man, she believed. He had treated them in the most manly way. Since the election he had secured the Forest Grove principalship for Mr. Cornman, and promised him the County Superintendency whenever he wished to run. Mrs. Cornman honestly explained that the favor of a man like La Grange was worth as much to them as a short term in the legislature.

Mrs. Cornman wanted to talk with Hulda alone, and after the dinner was over and her husband was giving the hostess his views on the Chinese question, she boldly suggested to the girl that she had not seen the conservatory. Hulda took her out and pinned a cluster of orchids to her friend's throat, with her white, perfumed hands. Mrs. Cornman clasped her waist and looked at her with proud admiration.

"Do you know, I've had a brilliant idea since I came here," she said.

"Your ideas are always so, Mrs. Cornman," said Hulda.

"But this is especial—very. Do you know, Hulda, you and our Mr. La Grange would make a splendid match. Such a union of style, and talent and all."

The girl drew away slightly, but smiled composedly.

"Don't lower yourself to such schemes, Mrs. Cornman. Your idea is quite impossible. I am not a marrying girl. Don't you see I am wedded to my painting? Besides, La Grange, it seems to me—it seems to me," she was apparently reflecting, her chin in her hand, "it seems to me he was already engaged, even three years ago, to one of those Bird's Flat girls. He ought to marry a politician's daughter."

"But, Hulda," insisted this engineering woman, "he has some peculiar interest in you, I know. He called on me after the election, and I was speaking of you. He said he owed much of his success to some things you had said to him. He said your candid expression of opinion quite broke him of a bad habit he used to have of practicing petty deceits to

gain advantage. He spoke as if he would like you to know it, too. We all think he is absolutely perfect up there. I know he got his election honestly. I remembered how you treated him at your mother's funeral, too, and I explained that away. I knew you didn't mean to do that, and I told him about it, to tell him so.”

Hulda was bending over a La France rose that had bloomed in the sunny corner.

“There was more said about you, too, and I am going to tell you all. He asked me point blank if that scandal about you and the baby was true.”

It is needless to say that Mrs. Cornman was also seeking satisfaction for her own curiosity. Hulda's face was white as she put her lips to the pink rose, and Mrs. Cornman was a trifle near-sighted.

“And what did you tell him, Mrs. Cornman?”

“I told him you had neither confessed or denied it. Why didn't you deny it, Hulda?”

The face was turned away now, and there was a hard, set look about the lips. The pain at her heart was unendurable, but she was supreme over the moment.

“Very well, Mrs. Cornman,” she said firmly, “I will put you all at rest on that point now and forever. I don't need the favor of the mountain people. When Mr. La Grange asks you about it again, you tell him that the child is mine, and that I said so. Come, Mrs. Markham will need me.”

She took the arm of the breathless woman and led her swiftly back to the front parlor. Here she as-

tonished Mrs. Markham by sitting down to the piano and playing several noisy marches, and then directing her entire conversation, spiced with brilliant and witty remarks, to the somewhat bewildered husband of Mrs. Cornman.

When the guests had gone Hulda helped Mrs. Markham to her bed with her usual gentle offices, and then, barely across the threshold of her own room, she sunk into the soft curly rug, clutching the wool spasmodically, and smothering the moans on her lips. There was but one thought and it ran over and over in her brain.

"He doubts my honor, he thinks so; he thinks I am unworthy! My God, my God, help me now!"

Long after midnight she crept to her bed to seek the sleep she knew she must have. As far as she was able to judge she thought that Mrs. Cornman would communicate her newly acquired information to her husband, who would probably find some way of informing La Grange. The girl had been driven into a corner by a weapon that probed deeply, and in a moment of anger she had thrown out a defiant falsehood to protect her at least from further attacks.

"It is all over now," she reflected, when she awoke in the morning. "If he can think evil of me, he might as well believe it. I am glad this is the end."

For several days thereafter Hulda kept to her studio. Mrs. Markham had her easiest chair taken up that she might watch the work of the brush.

"I want to go to Italy," said Hulda, patting the color on the cheek of a girl-head study.

"Well, you shall go to Italy, Dacie, when Archie comes out," said Mrs. Markham.

The door opened. It was Satsuma, the soft-footed Jap-waiter, recently employed for the winter.

"Ther's a man in the parlor wants to see Miss Hardy."

"Oh, Satsuma!" cried Mrs. Markham, "you are all wrong again. Say 'A gentleman to see Miss Hardy.'"

"Is there a card?" said Hulda. Satsuma shook his head, smiling blandly.

Miss Hardy went down wonderingly. No wonder Satsuma was mystified. A large man in a short coat, his hat in his lap, sat upright in the great crimson silk chair, staring at a statuette in the corner. Hulda advanced to the center of the room. All her girlhood rushed back upon her, the bright days of dime socials, and writing-schools. This man had been her brother and friend. Now all the world was hollow. She held out both hands.

"Oh, David, David. I *wanted* to see you."

David came and kissed her, with his arm around her. She was his sister and had always been.

"What a beautiful lady you have grown to be! You're stunning, Hulda. Why, what's the matter? Don't cry, Hulda, there don't, don't."

"Oh, it's nothing, Dave. But you came upon me so suddenly. You made me think of mother, and—everything. I'm all right now. Come, sit down and tell me all the news."

She pressed him into the silk chair, and brought the light extra piano stool close to the arm, for herself.

"Let me take your hat, David. Dear me, you look just like your good old self. Now tell me all about Cis. How is she any way? Dear little Cis, I suppose she's perfectly happy."

David smiled. He was quite susceptible to the pretty compliments of an accomplished woman.

"She's what I came to see you about, Hulda. She's not very well. She worries too much, about nothing, too."

"Worries. I heard you were making money, David."

"Oh, yes, it ain't that. You see, she's, she's, well, low spirited like."

"Oh, what's the cause of that? Is she well?"

"Oh, yes, that is, pretty well. But she's, she's kind of bothered and anxious. Er—er—"

"Anxious? How, Dave?"

David fidgeted in his seat, and his face took on several deeper shades of perplexity.

"Er—er—it's anxiety about herself. About her future health, you know. Poor girl, I'm all worried out too. Hulda, do many women die, die—when—My poor little girl wife!"

The young husband's head was bent in his hands.

"No, Dave, she will not die."

Hulda spoke suddenly and firmly, and rose and went away to the window. She was gone so long that David moved uneasily. When she returned to him her face had the same look, as when she took Cis to her heart after her mother's death, and she had crowded all her heart and life down, and had taken up the old burden of her life. Cis needed her again,

and for David's sake, and for her sainted mother's sake, she would be her helper.

She sat down again by David.

“I will tell you what to do, Dave. You bring her down here where you can get some good doctor to bring her through.”

“Yes,” said David, “that's just what she wants to do. But I didn't know. How had we better fix up here?”

Hulda walked the floor and thought.

“The best way to do,” she said, “will be to get a little furnished house in a quiet place. I know of one to rent down somewhere about 8th and G. Streets. Get her down there, Dave, and I will come and cheer her up.”

David looked relieved.

“I'll shut up the farmhouse and bring her right down,” he said.

He then went away and Hulda went back to her work on the girl's head with the steadier nerve that resolution affords.

With the exception of Mrs. Cornman, whom she admired, Mrs. Markham took not the slightest interest in her companion's country friends. When told that it was David Strong who had called, she said wonderingly:

“Oh, your agent of your property. Well, Dacie, we can get on very nicely without any of those low country people who did not appreciate you.”

And Hulda knew that she did not wish to be troubled by them, and that her visits to Cis must be few and short.

CHAPTER XXV.

ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 334.

It was not at all surprising that Max Royse should be the representative in the Assembly that winter from a district in San Francisco, not distinguished at any time by the high moral tone of its political managers. Royse was brought forward as part of a system, and was capable of doing the work he was expected to do. Financially he had given generous assistance to the campaign, and the campaign had placed him somewhat ahead in his ambitious schemes. He was aiming high now, and aiming well, and as far as outward appearances went he was just as desirable a candidate for higher political honors, as any man before the public.

Mrs. Ellis also had risen grandly to the demands of the time. The prosperity and advancement of Royse was also her prosperity and advancement, and she was not lacking in any of the arts, graces and accomplishments that she might need as the lady friend of a public and popular man. She no longer lived at the lodging house; her private rooms were far out on Pine Street, with a sunny bay window, and a bit of a flower garden to walk in. She was thoroughly genteel in her habits. She sometimes went to church on Sunday, where she sat in a pew

with Royse's children, with their nurse and the governess.

In fact Royse had nearly decided to marry her. She had come up to the Capital City and was occupying for a time, a suite of rooms at a popular hotel on K. Street. Royse was somewhat anxious to see how she would appear in such a place. If he had had any doubts as to her capabilities they were speedily dispelled. She was a queen wherever she appeared. She was vastly superior in grace, style, presence and tact to any of the women he found a chance to introduce her to in the hotel parlors, or in the Capitol building. He found some lobbying for her to do, and she did it far better than he had expected. There was only one thing troubling Royse at this time; he wished that he was sure old Ellis was really dead. Not that he cared, personally, but his appearance alive after the marriage, might overdo his capacity for lying, and compromise his political success. The captain of the whaler had sworn to him that old Ellis had been killed in a drunken row at Sitka, but he had sometimes thought that the captain's word was no better than his own at certain times. But Mrs. Ellis believed the captain's story; she was glad to believe it; not but what she had loved John Ellis in his sober days, but his drinking days had ruined him and herself to, and now she saw the door of society open to her as the wife of the thoroughly ambitious and progressive Royse.

Royse, any way, was crippled without her. He needed her at every turn, and when he had summoned

her to the Capital, he was in her parlor as often as he could and dared be, for her counsel and help.

The afternoon was rainy and cold. It was just before dinner at the popular and crowded hotel, and Mrs. Ellis stood before the long glass in her little parlor surveying the details of her new silk costume. She was a mass of shining jet. Royse was tipping back in a chair before her fire, his hands in his pockets, his hair in a tumble, and his mind in a state of perplexity.

"Minerva," he cried, "come away from that glass. I never saw you look better. See here," he continued in a lower tone, as she came forward, "I must be sure of one more vote on that Assembly Bill No. 334, or it won't go through. I'll be blessed if I haven't tried every dodge in the world on that La Grange to find out how he's going to vote, but I can't open his mouth."

"Have you tried the good old way, Max?"

"No, I'm afraid to."

"Afraid!" he cried in astonishment.

"You don't know anything about it, Minerva. He's a new man. These new ones are finicky sometimes. If I should be barking up the wrong tree, he might do me a great deal of harm."

"Why don't you hire some one to do your dirty work, Max?"

"Oh, yes, I hired you once, and got fooled."

They both laughed. Any allusion to that old affair was considered humorous.

"Come here to the window, Max, I want to show you something."

Standing back of her, he looked where she pointed.

"Do you see that fellow standing there leaning against that lamp-post? Looks as if he might be fresh from the country, or some far away rustic region. I see him hanging around that corner every day. He acts perfectly stupid; I don't think he knows anything at all. Now you smuggle him up here after dinner and I'll sit in the bedroom while you talk to him. I believe you could hire him for a cent. And I'll tell you, Max, if you can buy La Grange's vote, you'd better do it, for we're behind, if that Bill don't go through."

Late that evening La Grange sat writing in his room on the first floor of a tasteful residence on M. Street. He had taken board and lodging where he would be the least subject to interruption. He did his own writing and most of that at night, when some social call of paramount importance did not call him away.

He was working beyond his strength, he knew, but work was his pleasure, and he knew he could get some rest as soon as he would return to Forest Grove, his office and his cases now on hand. A stack of written letters lay on his desk, and he was about to begin another, when the ringing of the door-bell disturbed him. He was sorry that his landlady should be disturbed so late, and he hoped it was not on his account. Then he heard his name and a light tap on his door.

"Come right in."

The door opened and closed, and he glanced up.

He was used to receiving messages from his colleagues that way. A strange looking man, muffled to his ears, and his hat over his eyes, stood there in awkward silence.

"Well," said La Grange, with some impatience, "what is it now?"

Still muffled and in a constrained voice the man said:

"What'll you take to vote for Assembly Bill No. 334, and send back word by me?"

La Grange looked at him contemptuously, and turning to his desk took up his pen.

"Well, my good fellow, you go back and tell the man that sent you here, that it's none of his business."

He began writing. Still the stranger waited; then La Grange looked up.

"You'd better go, young man. This thing won't work either as a catch or a bribe." He rose and opened the door. Then with a chuckling laugh the coat was pulled down and the hat pushed up. La Grange shut the door and sat down breathless. The man before him was none other than Buck Dorms.

"Why, Buck, what does this mean? What are you in a low business like this for?" cried the astonished Assemblyman.

Buck sat down, unusually self-possessed.

"Don't know that I am in any low business. A fellow called me up to his room and gave me a twenty to come and do it, and I allowed it was no harm; I got the twenty and you do as you please. Besides I thought it was a good scheme to get to see you."

La Grange laughed and came and shook his hand warmly.

"Well, Buck, if it's a purely social visit, I suppose it's all right. Well, well, really Dorms, I'm glad to see you. You carry me back to 'Auld lang syne' and all that. Buck, it's been an age since I saw you."

The visitor rose awkwardly with his hat in his hand.

"Well, I suppose you hain't got no time to talk, anyhow."

La Grange pressed him down, and took his hat.

"Time? Buck, I've got oceans of time to talk to an old friend like you. Well, I declare! It makes me young again to see you. That was a jolly picnic we had on Cherry Creek, wasn't it? Oh, by the way, that was the time you eloped with your girl. Ha! ha! ha! That was great, Buck! You're a genius."

Buck warmed before such geniality, and smiled all over his face.

"Well, I guess I can't say the same for you, sir."

"Why, Mr. Dorms?"

"Well, I got my girl, and you lost yours."

It was Buck's turn to laugh loudly.

"It looks like it, Buck. You have the joke on me fair and square."

La Grange did not wish to continue that subject, so he said:

"You haven't told me how your wife is, and how you're getting on these days. How are the little ones? I suppose there are some babies by this time."

"Yes, sir," said Buck, "that's just what's the matter. We've had rather hard luck. Our little boy's got a bad leg, sir, and we're down here having him doctored."

"Why, indeed," said La Grange, sympathetically. "What a pity! Is he getting better?"

"Well, I don't know. You see the ankle's crooked, and the doctor has been having clamps on it. Now he thinks he will have to do some surgical operation on it. We've got a little house down on 5th and Q. Streets, and it's rather hard lines, with doctor bills and everything."

La Grange thrust his hand in his pocket.

"It is indeed! Now, see here, Buck. Don't you take any more dirty money from those legislature sharps. When you want money, come to me. I guess we're having rain enough to furnish sheep feed. I can trust you on that."

He took out a twenty dollar piece. Buck looked grateful.

"Wait till that fellow's shiner is gone. I earned it square enough. I done what he told me to, and I ain't give him away either."

"I don't want you to," answered the young Assemblyman.

"Besides," continued Buck, "I'm getting a job now an' then helping to load, down on the river front. But when the doctor bill comes in, I'll call on you."

"All right, do," said La Grange. "What? going already? Well, good-night, Buck, and come and see me whenever you need me."

Buck went out and La Grange sat down and took his pen. It might have been the picnic days, it might have been Assembly Bill No. 334, but he held the pen motionless, and for some time was lost in silent thought.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ASSEMBLY ROOM.

In due time, Hulda had received a note from Cis, and had walked down to see her, early one morning, to the house that she had described to David. It was a plain little house, neatly furnished, but Cis had a good girl in the kitchen, and, though not very well, she was contented and happy. Hulda soon found from her confidences, that Cis had mostly been troubling herself, that she might be closer to the friend of her girlhood. She had premonitions of coming evil, and her slight knowledge of physical truths awoke certain fears, that the early tragedy of her life might be disclosed. She wanted to be with strangers in a strange place, and especially near Hulda.

Hulda, in a fur-trimmed cloak, with soft black feathers drooping over her large hat, sat looking composedly at the unfortunate woman, as these confidences were slowly disclosed. Then Cis drew her friend's face down to her couch and kissed her, with the little white hands clinging to her pleadingly and refusing to be denied comfort. Hulda then renewed her promise, that never, through her, should the secret be divulged.

She then learned a bit of news, that at first startled her, not from the fact itself, but from the circumstance, that so many of her mountain home memories were clustering around her. She remembered the gratitude and affection of Millie, and was grieved to know of her affliction.

Q. and 5th Street was a part of the city where Donovan never took them when out driving, and she knew it to be a low and unhealthful part of town.

That afternoon when she took the carriage to return a few society calls in which Mrs. Markham was not interested, she requested Donovan to find the house for her. In the two years and a half that had elapsed since their last meeting, Millie had lost her feeling of familiar friendship for her old teacher, and met her with awkward constraint. The poorly furnished house that they had rented was small, and Millie had only her kitchen in which to receive her caller. There were but two bedrooms; and one was rented, Millie explained, to an old man. The lame boy, the oldest, lay in a cradle, and a ruddy baby boy of about nine months rolled on the floor.

When Hulda bent over the cradle and saw the heavy clamps on the child's leg, its white face and great, dark, hollow eyes, her heart was moved with pity for Millie and her troubles. She sat down in the dingy little kitchen, and tried to cheer and comfort the young mother.

Millie looked at her rich cloak, handsome feathered hat, fine cloth dress and perfect gloves, and tried to recognize her old teacher in this elegant person. But

she was proud, that she should have come to the humble home, and her cheeks glowed with excitement and pleasure.

While they were talking a door opened, and a gray, but rugged looking man, came in and sat down by the fire. He had a hardened, yet not unkindly expression, and after he had stirred the fire a little, he seemed lost in his own reflections.

Millie followed Hulda to the gate.

"He's my boarder," she said. "He works on the river front where Buck works. He likes Buck and wanted to come here, so we let him. It helps us and he's awful good to little Willie."

Hulda was glad that she had called, and spoke of it to Mrs. Markham in a general way, but Mrs. Markham did not seem to be particularly interested in any of the mountain people, especially those who might have some demands on her companion's time and attention.

Shortly after, the Bruens called. The colonel never so sure that his various schemes would result in prosperity to himself; and Mrs. Bruen, happy in her policy, and confident that she was a necessity in the little social world, that she had evolved from the heterogeneous elements of a legislature winter. Tonight she had a particularly bright idea on her mind. She wanted to take Mrs. Markham to the legislature with her the next day. The purport of the scheme, which would evolve naturally, was that Mrs. Markham should take her in her carriage, and that the colonel should meet and introduce them at the leg-

islature to certain persons he wished to affect by the solidity of his social standing.

Mrs. Markham smiled and looked at Hulda. She knew that there was an ax to grind somewhere, but she was feeling particularly well, and there was no reason why she should not look into the legislature halls at least once during the winter, so she consented to go, and told Mrs. Bruen she would send the carriage for her.

The Bruens made preliminary movements to go. Oh, there was one thing more! Mrs. Colonel had made the acquaintance of two very delightful people from San Francisco, an Assemblyman and the lady he expected shortly to marry. She would be so pleased to bring them to Mrs. Markham's next "At home" evening. Mrs. Markham, standing on a large fluffy rug in the hall, leaning on Hulda's arm, thought there would be no objections. Who were they?

Oh, it was Hon. Mr. Royse and Mrs. Ellis, both stopping at the Imperial Hotel, and Mrs. Ellis was such a lovely and agreeable woman.

Mrs. Markham started as if in pain; it was a convulsive pressure on her arm, and a strange look on Dacie's face. She gave her hand in parting to Mrs. Bruen, and begged to defer the matter for consideration. She had thought some of discontinuing her "At home" evenings, on account of her health.

The door was closed.

"What is it, Dacie?"

"I have heard of those people, Auntie dear; I don't

think they are the kind you want. They say she keeps a lodging house."

"That settles it, Dacie. I will tell Mrs. Bruen tomorrow. Dear me, I would have a perfect mob here if I were not careful."

Hulda ran up to her room, chilled with horror. But she had all night to think it over, and she resolved that if she ever chanced to meet those two polluted people, that she would be more than a match to them in self-controlled contempt.

Mrs. Bruen, the next morning, was fearful that after all she might not get Mrs. Markham to alight from her carriage. She seemed to dread any sort of contact with a crowd, and her first view of the Capitol steps caused her to shrink back in her seat. Apparently a delegation of hack drivers, boys, and heterogeneous loungers had been sent out to receive her. But Colonel Bruen came running down the steps, so pleased that they had come, and so affable and cheerful, that Mrs. Markham stepped from the carriage, and leaning on the colonel's arm, with Hulda close to her on the other side, they passed into the corridor and slowly climbed the stairs. Hulda was as nervous and ill at ease as her beloved friend, but she bravely controlled herself and watched Mrs. Markham with solicitude and care.

Mrs. Bruen's plans matured well. They chanced to meet several of the colonel's friends in the upper halls, and the introductions they so desired followed, naturally. One of these gentlemen was an Assemblyman, and he was more than pleased to interest him-

self directly in finding choice seats for the fair visitors; so they presently found themselves in three soft blue plush seats against the wall, at the right of the Speaker's desk, and almost facing the entire Assembly.

The house was full at that moment, amusing itself while the Clerk was droning through the reading of a Bill, of which, however, the three visitors soon discovered, they could not understand word or sentence.

Hulda rapidly scanned the large and disorderly body of men. She soon caught sight of La Grange far across the room at the left of the desk, but he was not amusing himself by talking, eating fruit, or sending messages by pages. He was looking over several letters in a dignified way, giving some attention to the progress of the reading of the Bill.

Hulda shrank back into the folds of a great drapery that concealed her face in its shadow, and began searching for those two that she dreaded to see, and that she dared not come upon unawares and unguarded.

Running her eyes over the crowded gallery, she saw an elegant figure appear and take a front seat that a young man had evidently been holding for some one. A fluffy fur was thrown back, long silky veil was removed, and Hulda looked through her opera glasses, and recognized the face of Mrs. Ellis, its pink and white beauty not at all damaged by the lapse of a few years. By the direction of Mrs. Ellis' glances, she knew where Assemblyman Max

Royse was seated, or ought to be. Presently he came from another part of the room and sat down. He was seemingly tall, better tailored and barbered than before, and his hair a little gray, somewhat refined his appearance. He had a manner of having a great weight of affairs on his mind. Hulda shuddered as she lay far back in her seat under her furs, and thought of unhappy Cis, and her sad secret. Then she thought of David so noble and trusting.

She turned her eyes to La Grange and prayed that his wife, whoever she might be, would be pure and innocent and heart-happy.

Mrs. Bruen was whispering to Mrs. Markham and kept her entertained, and Hulda was glad. The dreary bill came to an end, and after a time another dreary bill began to be unintelligibly declaimed. There was a movement in the gallery, and the people seemed to be passing out. The girl rested her eyes on the handsome, conspicuous figure of Mrs. Ellis; she was looking down and smiling. Then Hulda's eyes were attracted by a man who stood nearly behind the absorbed woman. There was an earnestness in his expression and attitude, that caught her attention. In a moment she remembered that she had seen him before. It was Millie's boarder. He was somewhat old and unshaven, and unkempt in appearance. There was a strange, hard look on his face, and he stood looking at the woman with a composed curiosity, as one might look at a curious article on display.

While Hulda looked, he did not change his attitude, or remove his gaze from the woman.

Hulda became interested in the strange tableau, and she was suddenly recalled to herself, by the sound of a familiar voice. She looked around. La Grange was on his feet, and he had begun speaking in a low, moderate tone. He stood nearly facing the Assembly, so that Hulda had a full view of his face and figure. The tumult of the room was slowly subsiding, and most of the faces in the room were turned to the young man, whose opening sentences, touched with quiet sarcasm, showed that he was speaking in opposition to the bill. He went on speaking, with no hint of excitement or eagerness, but with that pleasant insistence and strength of statement, which Hulda recognized as his old characteristics in mental conflict. He spoke as if the bill were already defeated. He made no charges, but Hulda began to see that his remarks were ruinously sarcastic, relieved by bits of humor that further attracted the attention of his hearers. Hulda was trying to decide just what the matter under consideration really was, when she felt her hand suddenly clasped, and Mrs. Markham was leaning heavily upon her, with drooping eyes, and paling cheeks.

"Oh, Dacie, who's that?" she murmured.

Hulda encircled her with her arms, and called Mrs. Bruen's attention. But Mrs. Markham whispered in her ear:

"No, I am not sick. Can't we go out?"

The colonel's attention was shortly attracted; he comprehended in an instant, and with graceful ease he took Mrs. Markham's arm and supported and led

her through the crowded aisle, into the ante-room. Once outside Mrs. Bruen and Hulda were supporting her with solicitous questions, but she only looked at Hulda with pleading eyes, and kept hold of her hand.

"I want nothing," she murmured, "only to go home. I am not well, and this is such a crowd."

Once in the carriage, she laid her head on Hulda's shoulder, and did not seem to see the Bruens, who were full of anxiety.

At her door she gave her hand to them with a gentle good-afternoon, which indicated her desire to be alone.

Hulda always knew about what to do. Dropping her wraps in the hall she assisted her companion to her own room without question or remark. She put her on the lounge, with soft pillows around her; saw that she was not fainting; removed her wraps; lit the fire in the grate; adjusted the light in the room, and ran down stairs for a glass of wine. She brought it to the lounge, and Mrs. Markham took it from her hand, with a faint smile, and drank part of it. She placed the half emptied glass on a stand at her head, then she clasped Hulda's waist, as she was about to turn away.

"Dacie, Dacie," she said, "I am a lonely, lonely woman. Stay close to me now." Hulda knelt down, and with an arm about her, kissed her gently.

"Why, I love to stay with you, Auntie. I am so sorry we took you out. That was a horrid crowd, and it distressed you, I know."

"No, no, Dacie," she said. "No, matter. That

wasn't it. Have I been a good mother to you, child?" She put up her hand caressingly to the girl's face.

"Oh, Auntie, what makes you say that?" exclaimed the surprised girl. "You have been more than a mother. You have been everything to me. You have been too good."

Mrs. Markham looked at her silently, then she turned her face away, and Hulda saw the silent tears falling from her eyes.

"Auntie, have I offended you?"

"No, darling."

Hulda waited, silently caressing her hand. After some moments Mrs. Markham turned to her calmly with more strength in her tone.

"Dacie, he seemed to me what my own boy might have been, and he looked so much like the child's father. Oh, Dacie, the sin of my life keeps coming back to me. Can I ever forget it. Darling, I wish I could tell you all about it. But you would hate me. Oh, I did wrong, I know I did. And all my good deeds can't wipe it out."

"No, Auntie, I don't think you have ever done wrong," said the girl calmly. "Tell me all about it. You will feel better, and I can help you, I know. What is it, dear?"

Hulda had never seen her like this. She feared that a fever might be coming upon her, and had already deranged her mind. But Mrs. Markham still clasped her hand, and seemed more composed. After a time she began speaking slowly.

"I have wanted to tell you, Dacie, for a long time, but I feared one thing, and that was your condemnation. I have borne my trouble all these years alone, and now I am too weak; I need some one to help me. Do you remember one time, I told you I lost my first husband and my child on the Isthmus? Dear, I will tell you the worst of it now. My husband died, but my little boy was stolen from me. I never knew what became of him. But that is not all or the worst. When I married Edward Markham, I knew that his brother James loved me, but I loved Edward best. James came away to California, and in a few years we followed to join him. We were sick with the fever at Panama and our steamer left us. I was supposed to be dead, when my husband lay dying beside me. My child had been taken away on the steamer, so they told me, when I recovered, and my husband was buried. When I arrived at San Francisco I sent for James to come, I was so worn and broken with my trouble, it was all I could do. I had several thousand dollars that we had hid in my clothing for the trip, and I ought to have used it all to hunt for my boy. I think the fever must have changed my whole nature at the time. I was so dependent on James for everything. We did try to find my little Edward. The steamer people remembered that a man in the steerage had had a little child, but he escaped from their notice as soon as the steamer came in, and in no way could we find him. We went up to the mines, but the mines were everywhere then, and no one had seen such a person.

Then I was so lonely and miserable—and I had no near relations here or East. James was kind and he loved me still, so in six months I was married to him and my money laid the foundation of our fortunes. A little girl was born to me, but when she was a year old she died, and then all the old sorrow came back to me. I began to feel that I should not have married. I should have given all my life to searching for my boy. But James had no sympathy. He said we might travel over all the states in the Union, and never find him. Then his business was here and our investments were here, and James was always jealous of my lost boy. Four years later when Archibald was born, I was happy, and for many years thereafter. Now I have been a widow for eight years, and my first child, my little lost boy, seems to come nearer to me every day. I wish I knew that he was dead. And to-day when that young man stood up and spoke, he was so like my first husband, only Edward always wore a full, long beard; and his voice was like his, too. He seemed about the age my boy would be, nearly twenty-four. I was utterly overcome. Dacie, I wish I could know that young man. It would do me good to see him, after I got used to that strange resemblance you know. That was the reason I took you, Dacie, and I did so much for other girls before I found you. I wanted to atone for my lost boy. Dacie, do you think I could have found him if I had spent the rest of the money?"

Huida had sunk to the floor, and her head lay low on the couch by Mrs. Markham's side, but she answered in a clear voice:

"No, Auntie, you could never have found him."

"Why, Dacie?"

"Because some one stole him for love of him, and they would have eluded you anyway."

"What makes you think so, dear?"

"Because if they hadn't they would have left word with the steamship company to try to find the child's friends, and gain a reward."

Mrs. Markham was silent a long time, and Hulda did not move. Then she said:

"I believe you are right, Dacie. I am glad I told you. You don't think any the less of me, do you?"

The girl lifted her head and folded her arms around her beloved friend.

"Indeed I think a thousand times more of you, she murmured. Then she dropped her head and was again silent.

"Dacie, do you know who that young man was?"

"Yes, Auntie, I have met him several times in society. His name is La Grange. He is a nice young man, I think."

"Why have you never asked him to the house?"

"Why, dear, I don't know. It never happened to come about."

"Well, Dacie, we must attend to it, and I will include him in my list of proteges."

Hulda rose up, nerving herself to calmness.

"Now, we must have lunch, Auntie. I will go down and see about it. You must lie quiet, and I will have our lunch fixed right here."

She ran out, and down swiftly to Satsuma and the

cook, and gave her orders. Satsuma could be trusted to take up dishes and set a little table in Mrs. Markham's room, and she told him just how she wanted it done. Then she ran up the narrow back stairs and shut herself a few moments in her own room. Her heart was beating so wildly she feared she could not restrain herself. The truth was clear to her mind. As many times as she had pondered over the romantic history of La Grange, she had never thought to connect it with the casual remark of Mrs. Markham, that she had lost her husband and child on the Isthmus. But now everything was convincing. Mrs. Markham's strange perturbation over the picture that was so like La Grange, her great mental excitement on seeing La Grange himself. Hulda pressed her hands to her throbbing temples and hot cheeks. The consequences to her of the revelation were overpowering, but she tried not to think of that. The great thought was not to excite the hopes of her beloved friend to meet disappointment. It was too serious a matter with the mother. She must be sure of the facts before she made any revelation.

Waiting only long enough to compose herself she went to Mrs. Markham's room, and found Satsuma trying his best to make the dishes look just right on the table. She dismissed him with a smile, and, with a few deft movements, she changed the entire plan of the arrangement; then opening a small cabinet she took out two dainty Haviland china cups and a quaint silver bowl. Then she flew to the garden for three red, dewy roses, stepping into the kitchen

on her way back, to see that the toast was just right.

Mrs. Markham was sitting up in her rocker when she returned; with quiet, steady eyes, and a strange look in her face.

"Dacie," she said tenderly, "you are such a treasure. I couldn't get on without you. You won't ever get married, will you? Let me smell those roses. How sweet they are! Put them in the other vase. There!"

Satsuma here brought in a tray and Hulda arranged the lunch. Mrs. Markham sat up and sipped her tea reflectively.

"Dacie, now don't you think you could arrange it very soon?" she asked.

"What, Auntie?"

"Why, to get that Mr. La Grange here so I could see him. Don't think I am crazy, Dacie. I don't imagine he is my lost boy. I am not so silly as that, but I know I should like him for his resemblance."

"I might try," answered the girl slowly, looking into her cup. "When would you feel able to meet him, to-night?"

"To-night? Perhaps, but how could you bring it about?"

"I think the Bruens know him, Auntie. If I asked her, she would do most anything to get him here."

Mrs. Markham laughed with a merry appreciation of the sarcasm.

"Poor Mrs. Bruen, we make her a cat's paw for everything. She'd take a public hack to go and get him, if we told her to, but we mustn't do anything so bold."

"Just leave it to me," answered the girl, with good natured confidence. "I'll arrange it somehow. I will take the carriage this afternoon for some calls, but you must stay at home and rest, won't you?"

"I will, dear, I suppose there will be company to-night. Who else will you have besides this young La Grange?"

Hulda came and kissed her. "I don't know, Auntie. Now I will go and I will be home to dinner at six. Rest all you can."

Hulda ran to her room, but she only stood looking at her wraps in perplexing thought.

To go and see La Grange who had treated her with such coolness and contempt, and tell him she had found his mother? Never. And what if it might not be true. He would think she was planning to renew the old affair.

And what if he proved to be the long lost child? Then Mrs. Markham would be his, no longer hers. And this property earned with his money! He had more right to that, than even Archie. And she could no longer be a dependent on the property of the man who despised her. Neither would Mrs. Markham need her. Her own son would fill that longing in her heart that had been so hard to satisfy, and he would be everything. She thought of his adroitness, his gallantry and thoughtfulness. She was glad for Mrs. Markham. He was more than worthy of his good fortune. She walked the floor till Satsuma knocked.

"The carriage wait, Miss Hardy."

She had not made any plans. To go and see La Grange herself she could not. As for that, rattle-headed Mrs. Bruen, that was out of the question.

As she walked through the garden drawing on her gloves, she had not found any idea that suited her. Putting her hand on the gate, the right thought came to her. She could write him a note. So she went back to her room, sat down to her desk and wrote hastily.

"Mr. La Grange:—

"Will you kindly call at the residence of Mrs. Markham this evening, and send your card to her. I have just learned that she lost a son on the Isthmus about the time you were stolen there. Please state your errand to her, and explain your history. I have not given her any warning, but she knows who you are, and will be glad to see you anyway. Very respectfully,

"H. H."

She enclosed this in an envelope, having the name and address of Mrs. Markham on the corner, and without sealing it went back to the carriage. She had already decided not to trust it to the mails.

"You may drive down to the Capitol, Donovan," she said, "I have a message to deliver for Mrs. Markham."

At the Capitol Donovan carried it up-stairs, gave it to the doorkeeper of the Assembly, who gave it to a page to deliver.

When he came back, nodded, and paid a boy for having held the horses, Hulda felt as if she had signed

her own death warrant. She had ended her life of ease and pleasure with Mrs. Markham, and given her beloved second mother to another. As for staying a moment in her beautiful home with La Grange in such intimate relations, she had but one thought, and that not to attempt it. Her painful secret would become too evident. For when she saw him standing with such fine presence in the Assembly room, she knew that she loved him, and more than ever before. Then she thought bitterly of the last days at Hardup, and the wicked slander that had separated memory and happiness forever from her life.

Donovan had driven her to a vine-covered brick house far out on O. Street, where she made a brief formal call in the name of Mrs. Markham.

When she came out again in the sunlight, she felt that in another day she would no longer be the rich Mrs. Markham's ward and favorite, but simple Hulda Hardy, a country school-teacher. Then she thought at once vividly of those two who had been so loyally true to her in that sad hour, when even her illiterate school trustees lost faith in her—simple, honest-hearted Buck and Millie. She felt as if she wanted to see the true faces of Buck and Millie, if only for a few minutes, for the courage it would give her.

She told Donovan to drive her to the little home on 5th and Q. Streets, where she found poor Millie weeping, and Buck trying to comfort her in his rude way. Their trouble was real, and Hulda reproved herself for her weak and foolish heart.

Poor little Willie was to have a surgical operation

the next day, and Millie had already lost her nerve and declared she could not endure it.

"Now, Millie," pleaded her young husband, "'tain't no use to act that way. We've got to help the doctor. We ha'n't got no money to hire a nurse. Then he'll have the chloroform, and won't feel nothing."

Then Millie shuddered again, and wept afresh. Millie had lost flesh, and was pale and sick—worn out with care.

Hulda went directly to her and put her soothing hand on her shoulder, the furred cloak falling against the solid calico dress.

"Now, Millie, don't worry any more. I'll come and be the nurse. Don't you think I'd make a good nurse, Buck?"

"Blame me, if you wouldn't," cried Buck, "but you ain't no business staying down here when you belong at that fine Markham house."

Then Hulda stood up with firm dignity, and her voice had a ring of her old authority in the teaching days.

"No, Buck, you are wrong. I have business and a right to stay anywhere I please. I am going to stay wherever I can do good. Don't you remember how good you and Millie were to me when the trustees discharged me? Do you think I don't remember it? Indeed Millie, I will stay right here and help you. I'll be head nurse to-morrow."

"Yes," said Buck, with emotion in his voice, "don't Millie and me know how good you was to us once, when you rode over the mountain to catch us and

get us married all straight? You don't suppose we forgot that, do you?"

"Oh, Buck, don't, don't." Hulda threw up her hands, and in a moment she lay prone on the old kitchen lounge, sobbing hysterically.

"The Lord help us!" cried Buck, walking out of the room. Then Millie went to her babies, and when she returned Hulda sat up and took her hands.

"It was calling up the old days. I was so happy, you know, before mother died."

"Yes, I know," said Millie simply, "before they talked about you."

"But it's been good for me Millie to cry a little here with you. We won't talk about old days any more. Now I'm going to come here and help you, and I'll be here late to-night or early in the morning. Don't say no, Millie."

Millie could not say no. She was more than willing.

"I'll fix up the boarder's room for you," she said, "and he'll sleep in some other house. He'd do most anything. He's the most obliging man I ever saw."

Hulda smiled. Millie had a simple way of making people like to help her. She was so guileless.

Buck was restored to his equanimity, by coming in, to see the two women bending over the patient little sufferer. His crib was piled full of toys, and his bright black eyes were fastened on a bunch of red toy-balloons that floated over his head.

"It does beat all," said Millie. "That boarder brings a new toy for Willie every day. Ain't it

queer? He don't listen to us at all, but every day he comes in with a new woolly lamb, or doll, or something. And he looks so sad and dull, too, except when he's giving a toy to Willie."

Then Hulda hurried away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PICTURE AGAIN.

Hulda was back home in time to give Mrs. Markham the usual attention before dinner. She robed her in her softest black silk with a bit of rich lace wherever she could add it. She brushed her hair into many soft silvery puffs, and crowded on diamonds till the jewelry case was about empty.

"Oh, Dacie," protested the patient subject, "don't put that diamond dart into my hair."

"Yes, I will," Hulda cried gayly. "Trust me now. I am making a real art-study of this. You are going to look just right, never fear."

"Yes, but when are you going to dress? It's dinner time now."

"After dinner will do for me, Auntie."

They were still at the table, when the bell rang twice, as if pulled with a nervous violence.

Hulda started with a little loss of self-control, and all the color faded from her face.

"Dacie, are you ill?" exclaimed Mrs. Markham.

The girl clasped her cold hands together under the table, and looked pleadingly at her companion.

"I believe I do feel a little indisposed, Auntie. Would you excuse me from appearing to-night?"

Satsuma brought in a card, and Mrs. Markham passed it over to her with a pretty smile. There was written on it in the handwriting the girl knew so well.

"Edward La Grange. To see Mrs. Markham."

"To tell you the truth, Auntie," she said, calling up all her self reliance and composure, "there is no one coming but Mr. La Grange. He is very much flattered by your notice of him, and you can see him alone just as well. I do feel badly, and if you can excuse me I will be glad."

"But he is a perfect stranger to me."

If Mrs. Markham thought her ward had been doing some singular planning, she thought it no time to reprove her.

"No matter, Auntie, you will like him at once."

Hulda came around to her and encircled her neck with her arms. "And what if he should prove to be our long lost boy?" Hulda disappeared while the startled woman was struggling to her feet, and the trembling girl found her way groping as one blind up the back stairs to her room.

She sat down on her bed and pressed her beating heart with her hands. She had already partly formed a plan of conduct, if it should be that La Grange had a better right there than herself. She would leave the house that night and make Millie's sick child an excuse for a long absence. By that time she could decide what to do, and she thought of David as her friend and helper. It took but a few moments to go about her room and make a small package of a plain dress and a few toilet articles. She grew calm and

stronger making these simple preparations. After a time she went out into the upper hall and listened. The house was so oppressively still. She crouched down at the head of the stairs.

"Satsuma."

Satsuma came gliding softly out of the back hall below.

"Come up here, Satsuma." Satsuma came, soft-footed.

"Satsuma, where's Mrs. Markham?"

"She—the front parlor."

"And the gentleman, too?"

"Yes, Miss Hardy."

"Is the fire all right there?"

"I know not. The door is shut."

"But you must attend to it, Satsuma. Go and knock at the door and tell her you must fix the fire."

Satsuma did exactly as he was told. The fire did evidently need fixing, for he came out for fuel, and after having gone in again, repaired to his post in the lower hall.

"Satsuma." Satsuma came again.

"Satsuma, what are they doing in the parlor?"

Satsuma knew his place; he hesitated, but the girl was imperative.

"Tell me."

"Oh, Miss Hardy, they cry."

"Both cry?"

"I think both cry."

"What else?"

"She like the young man. She hold he hand. He put his arm around her. She is very nice lady."

"Indeed she is, Satsuma. That young man is her son. Now go down and watch the fire, for he may stay a long time, and she will forget it."

As she crossed the threshold of her room a startling remembrance crossed her mind.

The picture—he must not see it—he would recognize the scene at once. Then the thought of the immodesty of having done it at all, almost overpowered her.

Satsuma slept at his post in the lower hall. It was late, and he studied a great deal between his duties. He wanted to learn the English so well; faithful, studious Satsuma! He had to wait till all had retired, to close the house for the night, and so he slept before his little table in the hall. He was roused by the sweet voice of his mistress, who stood under the bright light by the parlor door, leaning in the encircling arm of the young Assemblyman, with the brightest, happiest look on her face, that it had known since the crown of hair had silvered above it.

"Satsuma."

"I am here."

"Go up stairs, Satsuma, and bring down that picture in the hall with the Japanese silk draped in front of it. You can take it right out of the frame, Satsuma."

She turned her bright eyes up to the face above her.

"About this remarkable picture, Edward, I want to tell you. While I was in Boston I had my ward paint a picture that should be especially for me. I

was so unhappy at that time. I was thinking every day of your father and you, and the young girl reproduced my thoughts in the picture. A figure in the picture bears such a close resemblance to your father and you. It was a clear case of mind influence. My thought was transmitted to her."

Satsuma came softly down the stairs.

"There is no picture at all. It is not there."

"Oh, dear, Dacie has it. Go knock at her door."

Again he came down.

"She sleep—She does not wake."

"Wait, Edward, I will go up and get it."

Mrs. Markham, with Satsuma's lamp in her hand, opened the door of her "ward's" room. She remembered that Dacie had not seemed well. But the bed was undisturbed, and an open bit of writing was pinned to the yellow plush cover on the light stand.

"Dear Auntie:—I have heard that a friend's child is very ill, and I feel that I ought to go. You will spare me, won't you, for a few days. You have your son now, and you can well spare me. I am so glad for you. I had heard La Grange's history, and I almost knew it was so when you told me. I tried to manage it for the best for you.

"Loving and gratefully,

"DACIE."

Mrs. Markham read it wonderingly, but so great had been the excitement of the evening, and so engrossed was she in her new joy, that the impression it made was very slight. She was willing to spare

her, or any one else—her only thought was her son—her first born, long lost son.

But that she did not find the picture in that room or the studio, surprised and distressed her. She was disappointed and disturbed, as she came down stairs.

“Satsuma, I shall think that picture has been stolen. Look everywhere in the house for it. And, Satsuma, see that the blue room is ready. This gentleman will stay here to-night.”

Whatever La Grange thought of the picture and its story, he said little in regard to it. He, too, was entirely controlled by the joy of the present moment, and the meaning to him of the happy discovery. He had found himself at his wit's end from the first to explain to his “beautiful mother,” as he called her the first few days, how it was that he had not found her before. He had to go over the explanation many times. He had known nothing about his orphanage till he was eight or nine years old, when his natural gift of observation made known to him, that he was not the son of La Grange. Then he had been brought up to rock the cradle for his foster mother, and to have a feeling of brotherhood and obligation towards the children. When Mr. La Grange died he had to take the place of the father of the family. Just before Mr. La Grange died, he had told him that his own father and mother had died on the Isthmus, and implored him to be a brother to the helpless little ones. Then his foster mother had shown and given him what was left of the little clothes he had been dressed in when he was brought

from Panama, and which the elder La Grange had put by when he had been able to procure others—not with any definite purpose, but as objects of curiosity. La Grange had rolled them up and kept them, stowing them away in the bottom of his trunk, when he no longer lived at the mountain home. His duty to the family, and his own ambition, were then the leading impulses of his life, and he had thought of nothing to search for except the identification of his name and relationship. But this he intended to do some time, when possessed of means and leisure.

Convinced of all this, Mrs. Markham then asked the great question that had lain so heavily on her heart

“Could I have found you, if I had searched more and gone farther?”

“No, no, mother, you would not have found me. Mr. La Grange was mining in a deep cañon far from any stage station. When he married he took up a little place fifteen miles from Forest Grove, and there we were six miles from any town. There I was brought up to almost live in the woods on my pony, looking after our sheep and hogs. We had a garden and started an orchard, and Mr. La Grange worked in the mines.”

“My poor boy,” sighed the mother.

La Grange laughed heartily, and set his head in his own proud fashion.

“Why, no, mother, that was good for me. I was tough as a little Indian, and when I learned to read, the people used to lend me all the books they had.

There were many well educated Eastern people stowed away in those mountains, in those days, and, mother, to tell the truth, my social influences were better than they are now in the legislature of our State."

Then they were very merry together over his independent criticism.

La Grange had thought it best, and so had she, upon reflection, that he should not change his name till after the close of the legislative session; and that they would let the fact of his relationship to her come out only gradually through her most intimate friends.

But she refused to be parted from him for a moment. The day after the discovery, she had had him remove, with all his papers, effects and belongings, to the handsome blue room, and get a secretary to do his writing; and what with his coming and going, and the clerks with special business, Satsuma was kept awake day and night. And the horses were in the carriage every day, standing in front of the old mansion, or going to and from the Capitol Building.

Mrs. Markham found the Assembly Chamber a delightful spot. Her chair beneath a window on the right was soft spacious and comfortable, and she ignored all that was unpleasant in the people she met or the controversial aspect of the legislature. She sat absorbed in happiness, her eyes and ears on the figure and words of her new found son, whose abilities and fine personal qualities were winning him many disinterested friends and admirers.

One day just before the dinner hour at the home,

Mrs. Markham received a note from Hulda, begging for a longer absence, and asking for some clothing from her bureau, to be sent by the bearer, a plain elderly looking man, Millie's boarder, and it was not until after he had gone that Mrs. Markham noticed that the address was not on the note.

"Dear me," she said, standing in the library bay window, "Dacie's absence at any other time would have been unendurable. I would have inquired into it and brought her home, but now I can think of no one but you, Edward."

"But you ought to know where she is," he said gravely.

"Oh, I can trust her," she said, "she's all right. She will be home in a few days."

"My mother," he said thoughtfully, and with a manner of doing a disagreeable duty, "did you ever investigate that strange gossip that went around about her about the time her mother died?"

"What? That a stray child was hers? Oh, yes, I talked with Mrs. Cornman about it, but I don't believe a word of it."

"But I understand that she has acknowledged it."

"Why, when?"

"When Prof. Cornman was down he told me that she acknowledged it to his wife here at your house."

"Edward, it can't be so."

"I am surprised, but so he said."

She was silent and she bent her white face over her cold clasped hands.

"You are shivering, mother," he said tenderly. "I am sorry I told you."

"Oh, Edward," she wept, leaning on his warm arm, "I will never be disappointed in you. Your father was a true and good man if there ever was one."

"I shall try to be like him, my precious mother."

Her head lay on his shoulder and then both were silent.

"Meanwhile," she said later, "don't let us speak of Dacie at all. She brought you to me, God bless her! When she comes home I will make her tell me all about it, and then I can judge."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DR. WELCOME MAKES A PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT.

That same night Hulda sat alone by the crib of the little sufferer. She had insisted upon doing all the night watching. Millie was already worn out, and Buck could not handle the child, as she could. Only a woman's gentle hand could turn the boy when he awoke from his fitful slumber. He was not doing as well as the surgeon had hoped he would. But this night he was resting well, and Hulda's thoughts, if not her attention, were turned back to herself. In the two weeks of labor and care for her friends she had had a constant struggle to control her own thoughts, and she had grown thinner, and her face was almost as pale as the child's white brow. She lay back in the large old fashioned rocker, that Millie's boarder had purchased at some second hand store, and pressed upon their acceptance; her hands were clasped rigidly upon her lap, and her large eyes stared at the ceiling.

The change in her life had filled her with a new hopelessness. Even Millie with her sick child had more happiness than she. There was nothing now to do, but to go away from every one who had ever known her, and to leave them all, with the joys she had been the instrument of bringing them. Cis,

with her good husband; La Grange, with his mother. She thought of Boston. Alfred Hoffner could and would help her to get pupils in painting. It was easier to dwell upon what she could do than to think of leaving all and everything; for she loved them all, her friends, her social advantages, everything.

She was embittered, rebellious, unresigned. Why had her life been such a failure? It had been one long series of blunders and mistakes. She had made a mistake in going, an ignorant, unsophisticated girl, to San Francisco, alone on the advice of a good clergyman, who knew no more about the wickedness of the world than a child. She had blundered in being willing to help Cis, by bringing home her infant without knowing anything about the circumstances. She had blundered in not telling her mother of Mr. Cornman's first wooing. He had only become her enemy by being tempted to a second proposal. She had made a mistake when she had given up her chance at Forest Grove, before asking La Grange to explain. Had she been more cautious she would have remained at Forest Grove, and La Grange might have been her friend when her trouble came. They might have learned to understand each other better. She had done wrong in not discerning that David might marry Cis, if he did not know the truth.

Millie had told her how the evil talk had been revived by David's marriage, and her visit at that time.

Then she had erred by painting that picture in the east. She would have to steal it yet from its hiding place and burn it. And she had done wrong, when

she had exclaimed to Mrs. Cornman, in a petulant passion, that the child was hers. It was unwise to be angry after so long, over the curiosity which was but natural. She had accused La Grange of dishonor, and been unwilling to trust him for the future; she had cast him off for one fault, and because he had wondered and inquired, with all the county testifying against her, she had been angry and cast away the jewel of her own integrity. Mrs. Cornman would not believe her now, should she deny it.

Errors, blunders, calamity, and through it all she had been true to her friends, a pure, loving woman, and she was glad of that. She knelt by the crib to put her fingers on the little wrist to note the pulse. She had a heart to pity the suffering yet, a heart to love and help. A heart yet too proud to be selfish, too noble to betray. She was glad of that. She noted that the child's pulse was stronger than it had been, and she arose with a feeling of relief. It meant that she could be getting ready to go away to her mother's grave, and then, Boston. She walked to the window noiselessly and looked out. A mass of scudding clouds had just passed over, and the moon round and bright overhead, came out in all its splendor. She was looking towards the east across some vacant lots. The great dome of the Capitol building shone out white and still in the moonlight.

To leave everything! She clasped her hands to her beating temples. It was another rush of bitter memories. La Grange whom she helped to nobler principles, whom she gave to his mother, who was

steadily climbing to his high destiny, and whom she still loved in memory, yet hated in her prouder, stronger moments. She sank on her knees and relieved her heart and her head in her first burst of tears.

When daylight came, the old man, Millie's boarder, came in and begged to be allowed to watch till the mother came out, and Hulda, (it was the first morning she had felt drowsy and sleepy), crept away to bed.

At noon she heard Dr. Welcome's cheery voice in the hall and she came out to get his verdict. Little Willie was better, decidedly so. His system was rallying.

"And, Miss Hardy," continued Dr. Welcome, "I have a message for you. I have a new patient, two new patients, in fact. They were sending a messenger all over town last night for a girl named Hulda. When I happened to hear it was Miss Hardy they were hunting for, I knew just exactly where you were and what you were doing. I promised to send you up after your morning nap. A friend of yours, a pretty little Mrs. Strong, has a baby boy, and she asked for you a dozen times through the night. You'd better go up, Miss Hardy. Willie is much better, and you need a change. Tell them I will be there this afternoon but I may be late. Good day Miss Hardy. Cheer up little mother, Willie's coming on." And the good doctor hurried away.

When Hulda had donned the street dress she had worn there the fur-trimmed cloak and richly plumed

hat she looked again like the elegant young woman who had visited the Assembly Chamber with Mrs. Markham except for the paleness of her face and the nervous watchful glance she lifted to every passer-by. She was not used to walking alone in that part of town—for many reasons she did not wish to meet acquaintances. The rain had begun to fall mistily and the grassy paths of the lower streets were wet and dank. She crossed the business streets with a more rapid step, and up Sixth street past the great brick church; there she had met many of the brightest people of the town; then a block east to pass the old brick, High-school building, where she had danced with far better grace, both mentally and physically than on the pine platform at Oak Flat, that dear old picnic day; and down by the high, whitewashed Convent wall, where she had walked in the grassy shade so many summer days, crowding the last pages of her text books into her mind; then a few more blocks of neat cottages and green gardens, in the soft rain, and she came to the small house set close to the street, where the Strongs were living.

David opened the door ere she had closed the gate.

"I am looking for Dr. Welcome," he said, coming out with a troubled, haggard face. "Hulda, she's gone clear out of her head since the doctor left this morning. She must be very sick."

He had closed the door behind him, and stood to prevent her from entering while he unburdened his trouble to her.

"What does it mean, Hulda? She doesn't know

anything. She keeps asking for people I never heard of. Who is Max? And who is Mrs. Ellis? and she says that she is alone in the town, and that we don't take care of her."

Hulda leaned against the wall and was speechless for a moment. Then she slowly drew off her damp gloves.

"Don't fret, David," she pleaded, "it's nothing. She's only out of her mind. Who is with her?"

"She's got a German woman for a nurse, but I can't understand a word she says. I was afraid to leave to go for the doctor till you came. Oh, Hulda, won't you stay? Can't you stay with us?"

"Why, certainly, Dave. Of course. Now get your hat, and hurry."

Hulda went in quietly, removed her wraps in the stiff little parlor, found the sick-room, bent over the woman for whom her life had been a sacrifice, and with the first touch of her soft fingers, Cis turned her shining eyes to her, seemed for an instant to know her, and grew more calm. The nurse nodded with a smile of satisfaction. The girl had meant more than her simple words "Certainly, Dave," had implied. Her meaning lay in her heart, and was the same self-sacrificing pity for an unfortunate, and the same resolution to keep her vow to her dying mother that had held her to her course all these years. She went to the sick bed to stay there as the interpreter of the unfortunate woman, who had lost control of her mind.

The nurse was efficient, faithful, strong and willing, and the girl knew nothing about the scientific care

that must be given, but her power was manifest when she took the tossing hands in hers, and hushed the pitiful ravings with her low calm words.

Dr. Welcome came in, lost his cheery manners, and went away without a word. He came back with his counsel, and Hulda waited with David on the narrow porch, the mist of the rain blowing in their faces, while the consultation was held. She had never seen David look so. His eyes had lost their steady, calm look, his mouth was working nervously; he thrust his hands in his pockets, and leaned against the wall, partly turned away from her. Hulda was painfully distressed by his exhibition of anxiety, but she felt almost afraid to speak to him.

"Please don't, Dave," she said gently, but he gave no heed.

Dr. Welcome came out with his counsel, hurrying away.

"Well, my good man," he said patronizingly, "don't worry. I think she'll come out all right." Hulda hurried back.

"Oh, is that you, Mrs. Ellis?" said Cis looking up wildly. "Tell Max to come and marry me now, for baby's sake, won't you?"

"Darling, of course I will," murmured Hulda with broken voice and fall of tears. "Now lie quiet, dear." David soon found that his presence in the sick-room was regarded as a sort of innovation. Either the nurse or Hulda met him with a frown, if he crossed the threshold. But no one objected, when he stood with wrapt admiration over his boy, who had a crib

to himself by the fire in the sitting-room, and who, from the first, showed perfect satisfaction with his fate in life, and systematically divided his time between his bottle and his sleep.

David could amuse quiet little Nonie, and walk the block watching for the doctor; that was about all he could do, and Hulda noticed each day a new line of care on his face.

But the strain was relaxed sooner than they all expected. It was less than a week when Cis opened her eyes one night and smiled upon Hulda with her old sweet expression. Later she awoke and said:

"Can't Dave come and sit with me some? You look so tired, Hulda." After another hour Hulda called David. She knew that the delirium was over. Her vigil had ended.

She went into the little extra bedroom, removed her dress for the first time and laid her aching head on the cold pillow.

At five o'clock in the afternoon she was still sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, and Dr. Welcome sent the nurse to arouse her. Then the days went on very well. Cis was cheery and happy; David found that his home was his own again, and was, and seemed, more like himself. Hulda stayed. Cis clung to her in love and gratitude, and the girl in the kitchen needed her supervision to secure the comfort of the household.

The first day that she felt that she could be spared, she walked down to see that Millie was getting on very well, and that Willie was improving rapidly.

Manifestly she did not wish to stay there, except in case of absolute necessity, and she knew that David was able and willing to give her a home.

One day at David's she glanced from the window and saw the Markham carriage drive up, and Mrs. Markham was in it alone. Hulda ran out. She did not want Mrs. Markham brought into that cold little parlor. She sprang into the carriage, wound her arms around her friend, and kissed her brow.

"I had Donovan hunt you up," said Mrs. Markham. "You look utterly worn out, and I think this is too bad. You are making a martyr of yourself. What do you do it for?"

I feel that my friends have claims on me," said the girl. "Besides you could well spare me."

Mrs. Markham caught the girl's hands in ecstasy.

"Oh, Dacie," she cried, "if you only could imagine how happy I am. My son is the noblest and best young man I ever knew. I am with him every moment, but it was to be so noisy in the legislature this morning, he wouldn't let me go. When the extra session is over we are going to San Jose to see Archie, then up to Rocky Divide to see his old home; then we may go East." Hulda divined with every sentence that she was left entirely out of their calculations.

"And," continued Mrs. Markham, "I have not forgotten that you brought him to me. I am going to make it right with you. I am thinking of a gift of five thousand, and with your cottage—"

Hulda drew away her hands, her eyes flashing.

"Which I shall not accept. I want nothing."

"Oh, but Dacie, let me talk"—

"No, no—" She loved her old friend; besides she was his mother. She wound her arm around her and kissed her white brow and the silvery waves of hair, then stepped from the carriage. She motioned to Donovan, and Mrs. Markham, with a surprised, grieved expression on her face, was driven away.

Hulda stumbled up the steps. "I believe I am very weak," she thought, "and this is the last—they have done with me." She found the door-knob at last.

David fond her leaning helplessly against the wall, and with a moan she staggered into his arms. The good German nurse put the girl to bed.

"I have her sleep," she said to David. "I think one week she not sleep anything."

Cicelia Strong now improved rapidly. David wanted to go to Hardup, and the Junpier mine, for business that could not be postponed, and he seemed to think it a happy incident that Hulda was there to be in the household while he was away. So David kissed his gentle wife and was gone, and Hulda bought an armful of quiet story books and read them to Cis. This was not making a good beginning in the economy she must practice, but amusement then for both was of paramount importance.

The evening David returned his wife met him at the door, and Hulda, in her little room, knew that their happiness was complete, and that her work was done. She bent her head in her hands and tried to

frame the letter she should write to Alfred Hoffner. He had wanted her to remain as his assistant, but it was an effort to think, so she went out to hear David and his wife talk of Hardup. His first news was for her. The cottage was vacant. The Cornmans had moved to Forest Grove. David was not favorable to the idea she proposed, that of selling it. He might live in it himself and rent the old Beverly place. He wanted to see Hulda clear the pines away and set out more fruit trees.

Later Dr. Welcome came. It was his last call, and made, so Hulda thought, to leave his bill. Dr. Welcome had shown a disposition to ask her personal questions, so she withdrew to her little room so near the sidewalk, and sat down by the open window to listen to the strumming of a guitar across the street. Dr. Welcome and David came out and stood at the gate. Suddenly the guitar stopped and the voice of the doctor came clearly to her ear.

"I know," Dr. Welcome was saying, "I know the bill is large, but I paid my counsel twenty dollars, and it was an unusual case. I can tell you just why. The woman evidently had no care with her first child, either an ignorant doctor, or criminal neglect, sir. I make that as a professional statement, sir, and you can put the blame where it belongs, probably."

"Then you took that little girl for hers," said David.

"Oh, I didn't take any one for hers," said the doctor. "My professional knowledge showed me that she had had a child previously. That was all. Well, goodnight, Mr. Strong. Your wife will soon be as well as ever. Good-night."

David, leaning against the gatepost, did not move. Hulda sat rigid with horror, till a sudden movement of David's aroused her.

"By Heavens! I shall know the truth," he said, starting up the steps. But Hulda was first, and stood before him.

"Dave, don't go in now, I want to speak to you. Come out on the street." She took his arm and dragged him down the steps, and out onto the sidewalk.

She walked on and David came willingly, but he did not speak. Hulda afterwards remembered that she had an inward feeling of condemnation or reproof, for her steps seemed light, and she seemed to be walking on air; but yet on her brain beat over and over those dying words of her sainted mother, "Be true, protect."

When at last David stopped, they were under the high, white-washed Convent wall, the street solitary in front, and the bare branches of the trees hanging over them.

David leaned heavily against the wall, and pulled his hat over his eyes.

"You are right, Hulda," he said, "I shouldn't go in angry."

"David," she pleaded, "don't ever be angry. Let it stop right here." He looked up at her.

"Hulda, you know all about this. Did you come out here to tell me? There is no use now, it's all got to come out."

"Poor Cis, don't harm her, David. She was not

to blame," she still pleaded. David's voice was calm and he stood up squarely.

"I understand that, Hulda. She is my wife and true and loving. I can't remember the time when I didn't love her, and now she's the mother of my boy; but Hulda, it's no use, this all came out when the fever came. I understood it all in a flash, when she begged me to go and get Max to marry her for baby's sake. I remembered how you went to the city and brought home a cousin's baby. I remembered how you stuck to it, and all. Oh, I have been fighting this thing out all alone. It's been a hard fight, but I've come out clear. It wasn't business up to Hardup, it was a fight with my conscience. Hulda, poor girl, everybody up there thinks Nonie is your child. Now this thing has got to be righted. I don't mean to harm Cis, she's my wife, but the truth must come out. Enough harm has been done. You needn't think it isn't hard for me, it's like death, but I'm not going to live a lie, or see you and Cis do it either."

"Oh, David, my brother," murmured the girl. He put his arm around her and drew her against his warm shoulder.

"Now, this is what I am going to say, Hulda. I want to know the truth of this, and all of it, not one word shall be held back. Cis must out with the truth, and go back to Hardup and clear you, and live it down. If she refuses, she can have the Beverly farm and Nonie, but my boy and I go, and a long way, too."

"Oh, Dave, you will kill her."

"Well, I guess not. Didn't she bear it in the first place? And isn't it harder to carry the secret in her heart than to tell the truth? I know she was an ignorant, wronged girl. But your help, whatever it was, saved her, and got her a husband. I'll be good to her, don't fear. Now, Hulda, I want to hear all you know about it."

She shivered and sighed.

"Oh, I know you're cold," he said, "but I want to hear your story first. We will go to the house and get your wrap and my overcoat and hat. I will tell Cis I have met a friend. I want to hear this thing though now. Understand, if you don't tell me, it will be the worse for Cis and you too."

A little later they were walking back and forth under the Convent wall, and David wrung from her the whole miserable story, even Cis Beverly's confession to her. David's mind took it all in with a clear grasp.

"And that black villain, where is he now?"

"Don't make a scandal, Dave, and get us all into trouble," she pleaded.

"Oh, no, I can do better than that, if he's got any money."

And then she told him.

"In the Legislature! The devil take him. Ah, ha!"

David walked on whistling. Later he said.

"Hulda, you have done right all through. You couldn't do any different after the stand your mother took. But now it's my affair, not yours. Now I'm going home."

He turned down towards the business streets, not towards home.

"Hulda, I'm going to put you in a hack and send you down to Buck's to-night. Will you go? I want to settle this affair with Cis. I love her, and she loves me, thank God. I want to be alone with her to-night."

"Oh, David, be kind." Hulda, hanging heavily on his arm, was weeping quietly.

David found a hackman he knew, put the trembling girl in the carriage, and hurried home. There he took his pale wife in his arms, kissed her many times on cheek and brow, and told her that he loved her before all the world, and that he would protect and cherish her forever. Then he told her gently and lovingly, what he had come to know through her fever and through Dr. Welcome.

There was only one thing poor Cis, with her short mental vision, had ever feared, that was, that she might lose David. Now she knew, that whatever happened, she would not lose him, and when she had agreed to do everything that David demanded, she begged to be put to bed, and she slept the untroubled sleep of a wearied child.

When Hulda came in the morning Cis was quite calm. She caught her hand and drew her down to the lounge where she was lying in her room.

"Hulda," she said, "I never knew a word what people said about you till last night when David told me. I didn't know that your reputation suffered. Oh, I am so sorry, Hulda. But what you did saved

me, Hulda, if you hadn't protected me when I came back to Hardup, I would have been lost. Oh, wasn't your mother good? Oh, I did love her Hulda, and that was what gave me a heart again."

"Oh, my mother." And Hulda sobbed helplessly, till David's boy roused them to active life, and its new responsibilities.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAVID'S LAWYER.

Edward Markham or, Edward La Grange, as he still signed himself in his private and public correspondence, was as busy as he liked to be during the closing days of the Extra Session. For his mother's sake, however, he was looking forward to the end, for she was so restive with the slightest separation. What with the attention he had to give her, and his duties beside, he seldom had a moment to himself.

One such moment came to him, however, one evening, in the blue room of the Markham mansion. He had just sent away his clerk; his mother had retired early, and with a sigh of relief he snatched up his old volume of Shakespeare, threw himself back in his easy chair, and turned the pages from pencil mark to pencil mark. He was in a mood for his favorite passages only. He was just smiling over King Henry and Kate, when the bell rang, and steps began to climb the stairs. Satsuma pushed open the door.

"All right, Satsuma, and don't let any one else in to-night, please " said the young Assemblyman, closing his book.

"Why, hello, Strong! This is a treat. I'm glad to see you. Come in, come in. Have a seat."

David gave him his hand gravely, and sat down.

"I suppose this call is merely complimentary and social," continued La Grange. "Why didn't you come around before?"

"No, you're wrong," answered David, tossing his hat into a corner. "It's pure business."

"What. Somebody after the Juniper? We'll see about that. I'm your man."

"No." And David's manner was so serious that La Grange rolled his easy chair away, moved an office chair to his desk, and sat down in an attentive position.

"I've got a little case for you, if you'll take it."

"All right, out with it."

"Well, it's just about like this—" David hesitated, but the battle had been fought and he had won. "Suppose—suppose that a girl had been betrayed under promise of marriage, had a child and covered it up. Then after some years she concludes she wants satisfaction or damages for herself and child, what could she do?"

La Grange ran his fingers through his hair, and looked thoughtful and distressed.

"What are her proofs and witnesses? Are they good?"

"First class, and the parties all here in Sacramento."

"Compromise, compromise, pay up," said La Grange, nervously.

"Yes, but how do you make him do it?" asked David, earnestly.

La Grange rose and paced the floor, his hands in his pockets.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Strong, why don't you go to some older lawyer. I am hardly competent to conduct a defense of that kind. I am sorry for you, but you'd better pay up with the first move."

David only turned around and faced him savagely.

"There, you're a fool. Do you think I'm on the defensive? Sit down here and talk. I want to prosecute."

The young man sat down and drummed on the table.

"But why has this case, this prosecution, been postponed all these years?"

"Because the woman is just ready to confess, and I want support for the child."

"Oh, but as I said, some older lawyer—"

"But we want you," urged David, "we want you to know all about it, to help right the wrong. *She* wants you."

La Grange was again on his feet, with a flushed and almost angry face.

"I'll tell you, Strong, I don't see how I can take the case. Why I had perfect confidence in that girl. I couldn't believe it till I was forced to, here lately. The subject is horrible. Don't force it upon me, Strong."

It was hard. David sat rigid, his hands clenched on the rounds of his chair. But the truth had to come. His voice was broken.

"Do you know what woman I am talking about?"

"The widow Hardy's daughter."

La Grange spoke with averted face and hesitating voice.

"No, La Grange, it is my wife, the Beverly girl. The child was—hers."

La Grange sprang up, backed away from the table, and out of the glare of the light. He stood staring at David. David dropped his head on one hand, with face half averted, and went on:

"Oh, I know all about it now. Hulda Hardy sacrificed herself, but she was led into it little at a time, and couldn't help it. Mrs. Hardy wanted to protect Cis Beverly, and when she died she made Hulda promise to do the same and she didn't know what the consequences would be. Poor Hulda has been tormented to death. She told me about telling Mrs. Cornman, but she said Mrs. Cornman accused her, and bullied her into it. Well, what's the matter of you?"

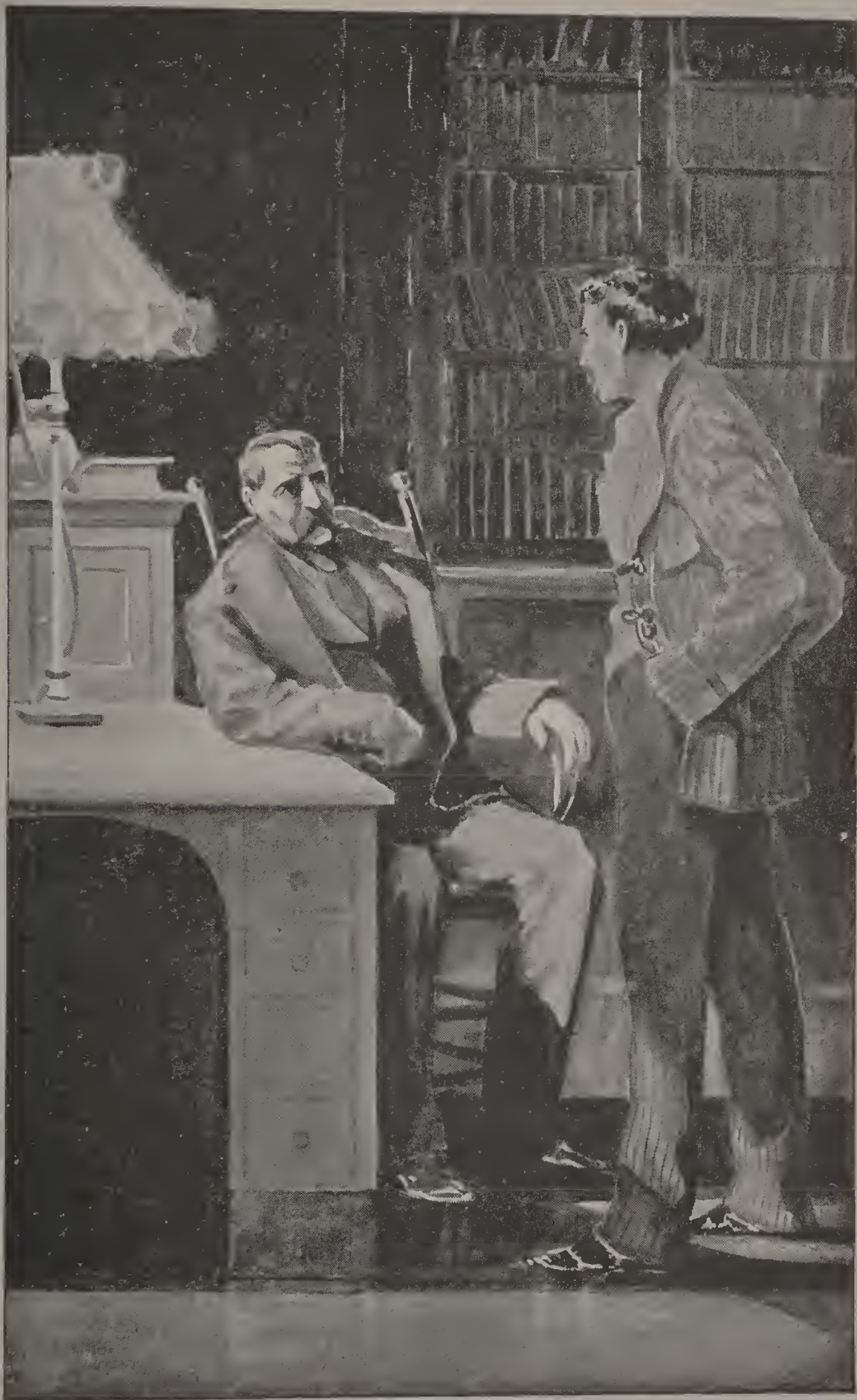
La Grange had sunk into his chair with a sound like a moan.

"Strong, shoot, and begin on me," he muttered.

"What have you done? How are you in it?"

"In it?" he cried, looking up wildly. "Why I let that girl leave her school and her home without lifting a hand in her defence. When you married I saw her reputation blackened and kept still, when I ought to have known her heart was white as snow. I have even turned my mother against her, Strong. Kill me—*me*."

David rose and came and put his hand firmly on



"He stood glaring at David."

the bowed shoulder. "Why La Grange, I never knew there was anything between you two. You act as if you might have been in love with her."

"I was, Dave, I was always, but it was a coward's love. She was inclined to be punctilious, I rebelled. Then she cut me at her mother's funeral, and because my feelings were hurt, I let that old Cornman shrug his shoulders and shut his mouth till I lost my head. And the proof was all against her. Strong, take me out on the street and beat me."

A bit of David's old humor came to the relief of both.

"I'll tell you who'll do it, if he ever finds it out, Hicks the stage driver. He's never got his wrath boiled down yet. Cornman's in for a good one. I'm going to set Hicks on him."

La Grange smiled.

"La Grange, I just found all this out. I've been around the Assembly all day getting my points. Let me tell you the whole thing."

"Heavens! No! Not in this house, where I committed the last and foulest crime against that suffering girl. Come out on the street, Strong. I must have air, air—I am stifled."

The two men, brothers now in spirit, went down the stairs softly, and sat till near morning in a room in a J. Street Hotel. But David's lawyer was firm on one point. He wanted to make all the plans himself, and if a case at law was determined on, to have the privilege of conducting it in his own way, with

the privilege of any kind of an alternative that *would answer the purpose*.

It was only a coincidence, but it came providentially.

The next morning when La Grange alighted from the carriage at the Capitol, with his mother, an elderly stranger approached him, lifting his hat respectfully. La Grange would have passed by, but his first words arrested him.

"Mr. Dorms sent me, sir, I want a lawyer. I have a case."

"Can't you wait a week? I am very busy," he said kindly.

"No, sir, my man will get away, as soon as you adjourn—it's Assemblyman Royse, sir."

"Eh?" exclaimed the young lawyer. "Come to my house at seven to-night. Here's the address."

And Millie's boarder took the card, bowed and turned away.

La Grange, as miserable as he might feel, could do nothing but go on with his own work. He speedily informed his mother, however, the next morning, with appropriate personal apologies, of the mistake Mrs. and Mr. Cornman had made in regard to the young lady who had been her companion for so long. In the afternoon Mrs. Markham took the carriage and went to Strong's house; Hulda ran out and kissed and embraced her warmly. Despite the great distance that would now separate them, she loved her.

"Oh, come home, Dacie," Mrs. Markham pleaded. "We'll be such a happy family together. You'll like

Edward when you know him, and he can't be with me all the time on account of his tedious cases. I want somebody to talk to me about him when he is away. Do come home."

Hulda was so sorry, but poor little Willie was to have his final operation, and she had promised to be there. She would come after that. Hulda succeeded in getting her to go away, believing that some time "her Dacie" might return. She knew no reason why she should not.

But Hulda went to the Markham mansion when she knew there would be no one there but Satsuma, and brought away her paintbox and a few dresses. David had come with her without a word, when she had asked him to carry them for her.

Her heart longed now for Hardup, and her own home, since David and Cis were to make things all right; and there she would go first—to see her trees all in blossom, and to visit her mother's grave; to look all her childhood friends in the face, and feel that her name was unblemished—that was her first desire, her now eager hope.

David had said no more about the doctor's revelation. Whatever his pain was, he bore it alone, and studied in every way the happiness of his wife and Hulda. He said he was waiting for some business matters to be settled in Sacramento, before they could go to Hardup. But Hulda had determined not to go till Willie's last peril was past. The doctor was sure another operation would complete the cure of the leg, and Hulda could not forsake Millie till it was all over.

CHAPTER XXX.

FESTIVITIES AT THE IMPERIAL.

Meanwhile David and La Grange were alert, awake, active, and laying their plans deep and well. They knew every move and plan of the rather garrulous Max Royse, Assemblyman.

They knew, that a little occasion of festivity was being arranged, for an evening in the week before adjournment; and La Grange had even been so agreeable to Mrs. Ellis in the lobby, that he felt sure of an invitation to the "quiet little affair."

He smiled grimly when he found it on his desk at the Assembly Chamber one morning, a dainty little favor in printed script with embossed doves "and the pleasure of his company," to the wedding ceremony of Mrs. Minerva Ellis and Maxwell Royse, Assemblyman from San Francisco.

"Doves, indeed!" he said sotto voce, contemptuously. "But I think when I get through with them they will be pretty well plucked."

He concluded to go to that select wedding in the parlors of the Imperial Hotel, and part of his preparation was to engage a small parlor in the same building to use an hour or so on that happy occasion.

Max Royse had decided to marry Mrs. Ellis, be-

cause she had become so useful to him, that it seemed to be the best thing to do. As he rose in political influence he needed more and more a wife to preside over his hospitalities in just the right kind of style. He had given her a thorough test, and she was more than equal to the demands. And then, ever since his wife died, he had wanted to marry her, if her social position could be made to bear the strain. She had made a better impression on the carpets of the Capitol Building than he had. There was no use waiting. He would marry her then and there, and his San Francisco gang would have to approve a match that half the Assembly had congratulated him upon.

The arrangements were without flaw, as an affair at the Legislature should be. There was to be a reception in the parlor, a minister from some little church around the corner, and later, a champagne supper in their private rooms, to the more select and especially favored of the guests. The quality of the champagne was to be a distinguishing feature of this latter entertainment, and gentlemen guests were to predominate. The lobby was to be well represented at the festivities.

On the auspicious evening, all the preliminaries went well, with the exception of a little revolt on the part of Mrs. Ellis just before dinner, when the maids and workmen were already changing her parlor and bedroom into a banqueting room. It was the diamonds Royse had brought up. They had agreed on far better stones, and Max was showing up a little of

his old tricks in bringing what he did. They had agreed to be honest with each other.

A compromise was affected after a subdued conflict of will power, and the maid employed for the occasion went to the dress-maker's for the reception dress. It was a magnificent object laid out in the dressing-room, brown rep silk, glittering with passamenterie.

Very few of the guests cared who was to be married, or what they were to be married for. It was a good place to spend an hour or two, and they were assured of something appropriate in the line of refreshments. They could see each other in dress parade, and score one more festive occasion for the season.

About nine o'clock they came thronging into the handsome parlors of the Imperial Hotel. There seemed to be no one in particular to whom to pay the compliments of the evening, so they turned their attention to amusing themselves. Royse and Mrs. Ellis moved about with no formality, but kept up a round of promiscuous introductions, and saw that the young men who had been employed to play the piano and sing a few popular ballads appeared at proper intervals.

La Grange was there and moved about making himself freely agreeable. He had changed his invitation somewhat, so as to include his friend Strong. His principles had not reached such a high point of outlook, but that he could commit this little forgery. His host and hostess in fact were pleased that such a guest should bring a friend. David found the corners the most agreeable to him. He looked extremely

well, La Grange had told him, in his new dress suit with a waxed mustache and a barber's finish to his glossy hair. He suffered a little with his gloves, but he kept his eyes on the tall form of La Grange, as the latter moved about, telling a story to one group, and drawing another together by his happy manners and quick wit.

After a while, David saw that there was a little hush, and a tall man with a book was elbowing his way to one corner, and almost before any one knew it the little ceremony was over, and the people were moving around to congratulate the newly married couple. Then the crowd began to thin out, La Grange came for him, and David soon found himself at the door of a room where a table was spread with a most tempting collation, and for a moment he forgot his real purpose and work there, and would have liked to have slipped into a seat in front of one of the tall, shining, perfunctory, darky waiters.

But La Grange was coming towards him with Assemblyman Royse on his arm.

"You will excuse me," La Grange was saying, for interrupting your program just a moment, "but some of your friends—"

David almost staggered, "Friends!"

"—have arranged a little surprise for you, and wish to see you for a moment in another room." Royse was agreeable to anything. His imagination pictured at once a gold-headed cane in hand of a committee and with appropriate speech making.

"Ah, yes," he said, "most agreeable. And, my wife, does she come too?"

"Well, no, not just yet. We will send for her a little later," La Grange said, pushing on.

David followed, indulging in a broad grin and a grimace behind their backs, but his nerve was unrelaxed, and his hands were under his coat tails ascertaining the exact location of a little nickle-plated revolver.

Royse followed La Grange into an open door way, and what surprised him first was the instant closing of the door behind him. He turned with a nervous start, and his surprise deepened into amazement to see three men standing against the door, and a tier of pistols, three in all, bristled before his eyes. The first man was David with a triumphant glitter in his eye, the second was Buck Dorms, and the third was Millie's boarder with a handkerchief-mask over his face, from which two steady gray eyes looked out.

"The devil. What's this?"

La Grange touched his arm. There was a glitter in his eye too, and he looked as if he, too, might produce a weapon at any moment.

"You are to sit down in this chair, please, Mr. Royse, we have a little business with you, and we want to get through with it as quickly as possible."

Royse had recognized Buck, and he thought he knew what it was all about.

"It's a devilish trick," he said, growing angry, "but you daresent hurt me." But he sat down in the arm chair near the table, and in doing so he came face to face with a slim young woman sitting on the other side of the table with a child in her lap. She was-

veiled, but he recognized instantly the girl he had once brought to the door of ruin. A cold desperate look came into his face, and he turned to La Grange.

"Well, what do you think you are going to do with this confounded trap? Whatever it is, hurry up."

"We are willing to accommodate you," said La Grange, sitting down leisurely, and assuming a business-like attitude. "Do you recognize this lady here?" Royse looked at the table.

"I am not prepared to say that I do, sir. I want to get out of this room—this is no time or place—"

"Hold," interrupted La Grange. "Then I will simply state that this lady whom you know very well, is prepared to institute suit against you for the maintenance of this child, with the lady you have made your wife this evening, as the principal witness, and a young lady of Hardup, Miss Hardy by name, as another. We simply give you a chance to compromise here and now."

Royse was staring at the pale little girl lying with closed eyes against her mother's shoulder. Then with an angry face he partly rose from his chair.

"Why don't you commence suit then? This is only a bluff. You haven't got any suit. Let me out of this room or I'll see you all in jail to-morrow."

But David's hand lay so heavily on his shoulder he sat down with a cowed look.

"Very well," continued the lawyer, looking at him composedly, "if you don't want to settle that, how would you like a criminal suit? We propose to-morrow to arrest you for shanghying one John Ellis."

Royse grasped the arm of his chair convulsively; then with staring eyes and writhing features, a perfect demon of guilt, he tried to get up to his feet. Then he burst into a hoarse laugh.

"John Ellis is dead. I can prove it."

"Oh, no, I'm not." Millie's boarder had dropped his mask and stepped forward.

Max Royse, Assemblyman, took a wild look for a window, but Dorms guarded the approach to the only one. He was trembling now, and grew so pale that La Grange feared a physical collapse. But he was looking at him with the calmness of a jailer at his prisoner behind the bars.

"And I suppose you don't want to get into trouble for marrying another man's wife," he continued, "especially before the adjournment of the Legislature."

Royse was primarily a coward and he feared John Ellis, and more because he saw at one glance, that the Ellis who stood before him, with that same determined expression, was more of a man to be known or feared, than the worthless drunken old Ellis, he had rid the lodging house of, four years previously. But Royse had been in a good many tight places, as he called them, and he was rapidly summing up his best way of escape as he sat there recovering his physical and mental balance. But reflection showed him clearly the peril of the present situation to his entire social and political plans, plans which were in the end purely financial ones. He turned suddenly to Ellis.

"See here, old man, what do you want?"

"Well," answered Ellis, whose satisfied looks belied any complaint of injury, "I don't know as I've anything against you. You really done me a favor. I had a chance to cure myself of being a drunken fool, and everybody knows there was nothing else bad about old Ellis. But I had an ownership in that lodging house, and a man's wife is worth something. And I've got more or less interest in this little woman and the bit of a girl there, and I guess you'll have to settle with them first, or else I'm going in to that banquet there and have a little chat with my wife."

Royse brought his hand violently down on the table.

"See here, La Grange," he cried, "as long as this is a matter of compromise, suppose you let me out of this for an hour till I can get rid of that crowd in good shape; then we'll come in here and fix it up."

La Grange sprang to his feet. "That suits us," he said, "Strong and I are your guests and we will answer for your safe return. My clients will wait here."

Royse paused long enough to smooth his ruffled hair, and he went out with his two very attentive guests close behind him.

The little awkward wait just before the supper did not materially disturb the wedding festivities. The daily press the next day had neat little notices of the hospitable affair. The fact that the bride went to San Francisco alone on the early morning train, did not become known outside of the employes at the Imperial Hotel, and the fact that there was no marriage

license recorded did not come to the notice of any one in particular, in the rush and excitement incident to the closing days of the Legislature.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WILLIE.

The next morning Hulda grew wearied waiting for some one to stir in the Strong household. David had taken his wife and little Nonie, and gone out the previous evening, and Hulda, seeing that the hired girl was competent to take care of David's boy, had gone to her room, and from pure loneliness, had restored a bit of color to her cheeks by a long night's sleep.

Not caring to disturb her friends in the morning, she put on her cloak and hat and went out to walk back and forth under the Convent wall. It was a little misty as if it might rain, but the March air was warm and sweet, and the long grass rolled in dewy billows each side of her path.

A sense of loneliness and aimlessness was growing over her. Her heart was filled with longing for her girlhood home, and the associations that were to be renewed, just as they had been shut off at the death of her mother, and which would fill her life again with memories, that would seem to restore that mother to her. Any way her mother's spirit could now come back to the old cottage, and Hulda thought of the experience she now possessed, through which she could dispense kind ministrations in the name of that good, unobtrusive, true-hearted mother.

The Graceways were gone, but there would be another good pastor whom she could aid, perhaps, by her accomplishments and friendly offices.

But with all these longings there came a crushing knowledge of a present privation, of which she was most conscious since David and Cis had passed through their crisis, and now needed her no more. She missed the æsthetic comforts of the Markham house, and the presence of the sweet little lady to whom she had ministered so long. How she would like to caress again those soft silver waves of hair, and sit reading to her the books for which those good dear Hardup friends had no taste. But she had no thought of crossing the Markham threshold. The chasm was too wide, and pride would keep her hand from any act to bridge it.

Walking back and forth thinking of these things, the linnets singing and twittering at their nest-building over her head, she raised her eyes to see David coming towards her, smiling in his good-natured way, and taking long swinging strides. David seemed to be in one of his old jolly humors, and she was glad.

"Hulda, little sister," he said, taking her arm and dropping down to her slow pace, "coffee is nearly ready, and you look as if you needed it—you look too pale lately. I don't like that. I'm going to take you up to the Juniper Mine and put you to tending ditch. I think that will warm your blood up again."

She laughed softly. "Yes, David, I'll tend ditch for you, and clean up the sluice boxes. When are we going?"

"Right off," he cried, triumphantly, "and I've come out here to tell you the news. Well, I've been putting a first class lawyer on the track of that old villain, and we corraled him in the Imperial Hotel last night just after he'd been married to his beautiful Mrs. Ellis. But Millie's boarder happens to be Mr. Ellis himself, you know, so we had him just where we wanted him. I'll tell you all about it after breakfast. I'll only tell you the sequel now. The old rascal was completely squelched, and my lawyer brought him to terms pretty quick. The papers are all to be fixed up to-day. He makes out regular papers of adoption for Nonie Royse, but I am to be made her legal guardian, with six thousand dollars banked with me for her past maintenance and further support. Besides she is to come in for something when she is eighteen. Ellis, who was shanghied by him on the whaler, instead of starting a criminal suit for abduction, gets three thousand dollars and a good mine at Forest Grove. How's that, Hulda? Royse was pretty good natured about it at the end, too. He said he was paying dear for reforming and going into politics, but he guessed he could stand it. He actually took up with little Nonie, wanted to take her and kiss her, said she was as pretty as his other little girl in San Francisco; but Cis wouldn't let him touch the little one.

Hulda stood looking at him, her round eyes full of surprise and wonder.

"But, Mr. Ellis and his false wife?"

"Oh, he's to have a divorce privately obtained,

and the whole thing is to be smoothed over. Now what do you think of my lawyer?"

"David, he must be a grand manager. He has done well. Who is he?"

"Oh, a fellow name Edward La Grange Markham. Know him, little sister?" He was pressing her arm, smiling down upon her.

"Oh, we all know he has talent," she said, increasing her steps.

"Yes, he gets five hundred dollars from both clients, Ellis, and Nonie's guardian. Oh, I forgot to tell you, Hulda. I am going to turn over eight hundred dollars to you for Nonie's first year's support."

"Who arranged that?" she cried.

"Oh, that was my put in."

"I won't take it."

"Oh, yes you will. You're simple if you don't. You'll need it, and you earned it. I want to see you put out more fruit trees on your place."

Hulda was silent. She had earned the money, and it would come just right, till she could get to teaching again. She thought of the school at Hardup. She could fit herself to take that position. She needn't go away to Botson now, with everything cleared up so well, and Hardup so dear to her again. Then David hurried her into the house where Cis was fretting over the delayed breakfast.

But David was too full of business to dally much over his breakfast. He took a cup of coffee and a bit of toast, then brought in two trunks so that the

packing could begin; gave orders that Cis and Nonie should be all ready for business when he and his lawyer called with a carriage for them at twelve o'clock; then he was gone.

And Cis came to Hulda, as she had done several times in the past two weeks, and wound her arms around her waist and nestled her head on her shoulder, whispering, "Oh, Hulda, I am going to tell them all how you saved me. David says I must. I could do anything for David. Oh, isn't he good, Hulda?"

Hulda's tears fell on the fair head.

"Yes, dear, I know it as well as you. He is good, always."

Cis was dressing herself and Nonie, when Hulda came to her, cloaked and ready for the street.

"Cis, I am going to send Buck for my things tonight."

"Why, Hulda?"

"You know I promised to help with Willie, and you will be gone in a day or so. I will come up when Willie is better. You know you and David are to stay at my house for a while, and I can come any time." Hulda kissed her and David's boy and hurried away. She had no intention whatever of being there when David and his wonder-working lawyer called in a carriage.

Hulda found poor Millie as unable to meet the shock of Willie's second operation as she had been at the first. The younger child was a great deal of trouble, and the young mother's nerves had been perceptibly weakened her by long confinement to the

house. She was alone. The boarder, she said, and Buck had been gone nearly all night, and part of the day. She knew that Buck was helping La Grange about something and was to be well paid, but that did not lighten her cares any. She was holding the younger child and trying to amuse Willie, and at the same time there was a rising of bread to bake, and a bit of the children's washing to do. To have Hulda appear was almost like having her own mother come, and she gladdened at once. With her calm-voiced, warm-hearted Cherry Valley school-teacher to furnish the nerve strength, how things began to brighten up in the plain, dark kitchen! The tea-kettle on the stove began to puff and sing and blow clouds of steam; the baby stopped fretting in his cradle to listen to it, and Millie began to step briskly around to put things to rights. Even the sun came out of a cloud and smiled in at the west window, and his slanting rays fell on the coiled hair of Willie's new nurse, who was herding quite a flock of ragged woolly lambs on the edge of the crib, while the pale boy's dark eyes shone with delight. He was somewhat tired of woolly lambs as objects of worship, but to see these decrepit creatures skip around the railing of the crib and hop all over his bed in the white hands of the "pitty lady," awakened all his faith in the capabilities of woolly lambs. Then, too, it was a great revivication of his fallen idols to have the rubber soldier ride the tin horse, and that he fell off made him the greater soldier. He did not note that with very fall of his warrior, the white hands lifted

him, before his laugh died away, and that he was gradually placed in a new position with his pillows patted firmer around him. Then his blood flowed faster, and he was contented to lie quiet again, holding his hardy soldier in his thin little fingers. This gave the "pitty lady" a chance to give the baby a gentle trotting on her knee, and when his blue-veined eyelids had closed over his little view of the troubled world, he was transferred to a gray blanket in his mother's room. Hulda doubled the coarse fabric over him with a shiver, and she realized that her long period of luxurious living with Mrs. Markham had unfitted her for the practical efforts that were before her.

A tramping of feet in the hall brought her out with a raised finger. But Buck and Millie's boarder were too full of life and hilarity to subdue their demonstrations. Such an array of new clothes and muddy boots! And the boarder turns out to be quite a handsome old gentleman with a new business suit on, and a great grey overcoat, with a velvet collar. And the pockets of the great-coat were newly stocked with lambs and horses and dogs. Animals of better blood and pedigree altogether, with the legs warranted to stay on, and the paint to shine forever. And the packages heaped upon the table were designed to bring good cheer to the little household. Millie opened them with exclamations of delight.

Oysters in the shell! Oh, what extravagance! Did Hulda know how to fix raw oysters? Buck "lowed she did," and she did.

She soon developed an appetite herself, showing Millie how to prepare the oysters, serve the pineapple, and prepare other dainties that Millie had never seen before. She forgot her own thoughts to help on the feeling of festivity in the hearts where care had lain so heavily, and talk with them of their prospects for the future.

Ellis had already engaged Dorms to help him with his mine, in the spring, and Hulda grew quite awed to see how much Buck knew about tunnels and inclines, and dips and spurs. While to live in Forest Grove was a brilliant prospect for Millie. She could realize the one ambitious desire, that had struggled into her brain, to take music lessons.

But Dr. Welcome called towards night, and distressed them all, by appointing a day and hour when he could come with the surgeon.

Ellis went out to inquire particularly of him about it.

"Nothing serious, nothing serious," said Dr. Welcome. "Just a little correction I have to make to heal up the open wound. The bone is straight now, and the leg is ready to heal up. I am afraid of fever, that is all."

"Poor little chap," Ellis said to Hulda, who met him at the door. "I had just such a little fellow once; he died in the hospital with just such a leg as that. Then my wife died, and after I married again I took to drink. She wasn't my kind, and after I took to drink, I wasn't the kind for any woman, and I don't blame her for putting me out. If you want

anything for Willie, don't be afraid to call on me, Miss Hardy."

Then when he went up town that evening, he brought down a box of white aprons and nurse's caps. Hulda could not refuse them, so she smilingly pinned a dainty affair of lace and puffs on the top of her shapely curls and coils of hair, and Millie declared that it was the most becoming thing, she had ever had on her head.

One morning when Hulda picked up the paper Ellis had brought her, she saw that Assemblyman La Grange Markham had gone to San Jose with his mother. For a moment her throat choked up, above her beating heart. There was Archie. What a vigorous boyish protest he would make because she hadn't come! But Dr. Welcome was at the door with the surgeon, and she dared not think of Archie or any one.

Then came anxious days. The fever came. Then a touch of malarial fever threatened to burn the little life away.

The "pitty lady" in white caps took all the care of him by day and by night, except when she allowed Buck or kind John Ellis to take her place while the child slept.

"But for you," Dr. Welcome had said, "the case would be hopeless."

"I hate to see you getting so pale," said Millie helplessly. "When he is safe you must go away."

Then he grew better, gaining with bounds as children do.

One evening John Ellis went up town for some needed trifle for the child. Buck and Millie slept, and the "pitty lady," in her white cap and long, dark wrapper, sat in a chair beside the crib. The child, as it slumbered, held to a hand of his gentle nurse; and she slept lightly too, her head lying back on the crimson shawl she had thrown over the back of the low rocker.

Ellis had met some one he knew on the street, and had company with him when he came back. A young man who seemed to have some complex design, for he told Ellis that he knew a great deal about sick children. Ellis finally became convinced of his competency, and was willing to give up his watch to him; he was more than willing, because he was clumsy enough about a child, and besides, he missed his sleep. So he went to his room in the same block, and the young man took the package that had been sent for, and went into the house just as Ellis might have done. He opened the second hall door and came into the dim room, where it seemed that the only light spot in it was the white cap of the nurse, over her fair face. But the nurse slept on, and after a moment's hesitation, the intruder laid his hat on the table, and sat down. He had taken desperate chances, but he was growing to be a desperate man. He had had quite enough of this wondering why Dacie wouldn't come home, and he wanted to know the reason. If he stood in the way he was quite ready to take himself out of the way. Then as he sat looking at that sweet, still

face, another emotion almost overpowered him, and he bent his head, his forehead in his hands as one sometimes does for retrospection.

Then the nurse wakened and came to the table with a swift movement.

"Why, Mr. Ellis, you are not going to be sad to-night, are you?" she said, turning up the light of the lamp.

"Oh!" she stepped back, her heart throbbing wildly, as she saw that head thrown up in the old defiant way. Then both were silent.

"I thought you were in San Jose," she said after a while.

"I was, but we are here now," he answered, with the most patient manner of humility.

She said nothing, but stood looking at her hand as her fingers rested on the table.

"I came to offer my services," he said somewhat faintly. "I used to be quite a child's nurse."

"I need no help." She stole a little look at him.

"But Mr. Strong writes me that you do. He says you were worn out when he left."

She threw a surprised look at him. He was taking advantage to mention David's name.

"Besides," he said, throwing off his mask, "can't we supply your place here? I think my mother frets a great deal for you. I am wearing out, as a novelty, you see."

"I am sorry," she murmured, her hand trembling as it lay on the table.

"Why sorry, Miss Hardy? Come back." She

stood quite still—then after a moment Willie threw up an arm.

“Pitty lady.”

She knelt by the crib, holding the little hands. After a moment she looked up calm and strong again.

“Will you hand me that glass and spoon?” He brought it, and she gave the medicine, and handed back the glass and spoon with as haughty a mannner, as if he were quite unworthy to do such a service. She neither looked at him or spoke, until the child slept, then she moved around the table to the window farther from the child, yet nearer to him.

“She may as well know now,” she said, speaking softly and firmly, “that I am not going back. She doesn’t need me and I want to go to my home. You are the best one to tell her.”

“I suppose,” he answered bitterly, “it is because I am there. You were contented enough till I was to come. I don’t blame you, I am unworthy of your society. I am worthy of much in this life, but not of your consideration; but I shall not stay to hinder you. I shall go away, myself—”

“I trust you will not be so unkind to your mother,” she interrupted, hastily. “Stay with her, it is your duty. Let me go to my own home in Hardup. You don’t know how much I want to go back, now—now that the trouble is all over.”

“I understand that,” he said, gently and humbly. “I am glad you are going.”

There was a long silence, then he came and stood close to her; he might have touched her, had he dared. His voice trembled slightly.

"I wish we could be friends," he said "You decided long ago that winter day, that we could not be more. But now for mother's sake we ought to be friends. I don't deserve it, God knows. I listened to the Cornmans. Can't you now, for mother's sake, forgive me? I have no right to ask you to love me."

He waited while she stood motionless, her hands clasped behind her. She lifted her eyes to the level of his hand that rested on the window sill. She remembered that hand, how it had held hers so firmly and kindly that night so long ago at Forest Grove. Then her heart rose in rebellion against the hard fate that had been hers. After all, the best thing that ever came to her, would be to go back to Hardup, and be free and clear-hearted again like a child. If she could have a taste of her girlhood joyousness, as when she rode out of Hardup to go and apply for the Forest Grove school. Here he was asking for her friendship. She couldn't be a friend to any one, only a care-taker, a nurse, a helper. If she could renew her heart and her life as it was then, perhaps she might be a friend. But why should she show petulance to him? Fate had been unkind to them, that was all.

Then she moved away and went to the other side of the table. She offered him her hand in a gentle and open manner.

"Yes," she said softly, "we ought to be friends for her sake. Tell her that my heart is in my own home, and that I am going there now. You had better go. I shall not need help to-night."

He took her hand and held it, looking at her steadily.

There was nothing in her words or manner that indicated that they could ever be more than friends. He dropped her hand.

"Good-night," she said again, not looking at him. Then he went out, as quietly as he had come.

John Ellis came back, and as Willie still slept, she let him take her place. She went to her room and threw herself on the bed, with the hand that he had held to her lips.

A few days after, the Markham carriage stopped at the gate, and Mrs. Markham sent Donovan. She wanted Miss Hardy to come out, she wanted to see her. Millie came to the door. Miss Hardy had gone to Hardup that morning, she said.

"And the sick child, is it better?"

"Oh, yes," said the mother, "Willie is doing splendid."

CHAPTER XXXII.

LILA.

One morning, a week or so thereafter, when the elder son of Mrs. Markham came to his breakfast from his morning correspondence, he found his mother in a state of evident irritation.

She placed the silver coffee urn onto its stand with an emphatic click.

"Dear me," she said, "I don't see how I can live without Dacie."

The young man shook out his napkin, with a thoughtful air.

"Mother," he said, "I am sorry you don't make me any more useful than you do."

"I can't always tell," she said. "Now Wong says there is something wrong with the reservoir in the garret, that feeds the stove boiler. Now if Dacie had been here, she is always down in the kitchen a half an hour before breakfast, and would have attended to it. She knows how to fix it. She always goes up there herself. I might as well send a stick, as Satsuma."

"Suppose I offer my humble services, mother."

Mrs. Markham smiled.

"I suppose it must be either you or Donovan in his

muddy boots. You have to bring a step-ladder in from the back balcony, and get up a trap door over the hall."

La Grange climbed up into the garret, found and remedied the little matter, and was about to swing himself down onto the step-ladder, when his attention was attracted to what appeared to be a mounted canvas loosely wrapped in newspaper, and tied with a cord. It brought to his mind what had been said about the lost picture on the night of his memorable advent there. In a few moments, he had turned the key of the blue room upon himself, and the canvas of "L' Adieu."

He placed it in the light and stood back to look at it. He knew it all at once, its history and its meaning. But there was one thing there, that had not had a presence in his memory, and that was a look of tender regret on the girl's face. He drew his chair where he could see it best, and sat down, and the present faded from his mind. He saw himself as he had been then—ambitious and proud, but boyish and self-willed, with a boy's reason and a boy's daring. That was but a child's trick to try to help her by altering her credits, and it had brought Cornman's judgment upon her.

"I was not worthy of winning that girl's pure heart then," he said, as he walked the floor, "and now I am not able."

"Oh, Edward, Edward!" His mother's voice had such a ring of trouble in it, he sprang to open the door.

"Oh, Edward, isn't this dreadful, dreadful!"

Her face in its agony had lost its pretty youthful look. She held a bit of paper in her hand. He quickly encircled her with his arm.

"Dacie is sick! It's all my fault! I shouldn't have let her stay away, but I was so taken up with you."

He was reading the telegram:—

"Miss Hardy is very sick. Doctor says dangerous."

"DAVID STRONG."

He crushed the paper in his hand, and clasped his mother's waist convulsively. She looked up at him.

"Why, Edward!"

He turned away from her, but she came and looked up into his face long and steadily.

"Why, Edward, were you fond of her too?"

For answer he kissed her brow, and went and sat on the lounge, dropping his face in his hands. She stood looking at him, her look of surprise slowly changing into one of comprehension. She drew a long sigh.

"Well, well!"

Then casting her eyes about the room she saw the picture, and went and stood before it. She stood some time without speaking.

"Edward, tell me where you got this."

"In the garret."

She looked at it again.

"Why, Edward, that's you."

Then she went and sat by him, taking one of his hands in hers.

"Now, tell me, my boy, have I been keeping your sweetheart all this time? I thought it was strange she would not accept my offers of reward."

"No, mother, we were not sweethearts, but we might have been."

"You quarreled?"

"Yes."

About what?"

He gave her an outline of his acquaintance with "her Dacie." What a luxury to tell his own loving mother.

"Now tell me," she said, "why you didn't go to see her after you came here."

"I did, mother."

"What did you say?"

"I asked her to forgive me."

"For what?" There was great emphasis in her question. He smiled faintly.

"I don't know, unless it was for taking her answer as final. May be for believing the slander about her for a short time. But what could I do? All the evidence was against her."

Mrs. Markham frowned.

"M'm, well, you shouldn't have implied that there was anything to forgive. What did she say when you asked her to forgive you?"

"Nothing. She said 'good-night.'"

"She didn't encourage you then."

"Not in the least, mother."

"I admire her for that," said Mrs. Markham, rising. "I understand this matter better than you do."

But I will have to hurry, if I get the afternoon train. Are you going with me?"

"Oh, my mother, may I? I will stop at Forest Grove, if you say so. There is a telegraph line between. Why not take Dr. Welcome up?"

She clasped her hands with a brighter look.

"That's just the thing. Go and see him right away."

"And, Edward," she called, leaning over the balcony, "tell Dr. Welcome, no matter about his work here, or his fee, he must go anyway."

What Mrs. Markham understood so well about the matter was only her own way of looking at it. Dacie was her companion still. She had not given her up. Dacie had promised her not to marry. Dacie was true, that was all. That she should not love her beloved Edward, that was incredible.

The three rode down from Forest Grove to Hardup that evening. La Grange rode outside with Hicks, but Hicks had very little to say.

"What was the news about Miss Hardy?"

"Nothing, only worse." He cracked his whip viciously. Later as they rattled over the broad, hard, divide road, La Grange heard him muttering between his teeth.

"Fools, blamed fools, every one of them!" Then he said: "Why, I brought that girl down, but I see she was too worn out to talk. So I didn't say nothing to her. She sat right where you're sittin', all the way down, and all she said, was, 'Isn't that glorious, Hicks? Seems just like old times, don't it?'"

"I 'lowed it did, and let her alone. But Lord, as soon as folks heard she'd come, they just piled in to see her. They all pretended they'd believed in her all the time. Fools! Then they all asked her so many questions about you, and your new mother, till they worried her all out, and she fainted away one night, and Strong piled the hull crowd out of the house. She likes them all, she's a lady, but they ought to come on to her gradual. Who's that old duffer inside? Ha'n't discovered your father, have you?"

"Oh, no, that's a celebrated physician, Dr. Welcome."

"Guns! Why didn't you say that before?" He took a swift glance at his brakes, and gathered up his lines. "May be you think I can't drive." La Grange decidedly thought he could. He held on with both hands and saw the first evening stars shoot right and left. The pines were swaying in a western breeze, and broken clouds of spring lay on the higher ranges. Patches of snow lay in the cañon. But it was a fleeting panorama; soon the twinkling lights of Hardup came into view. The graveyard, the church, the parsonage, the young pines; and then they swung around several straggling blocks, and the panting horses were reined in front of the low brown cottage.

La Grange went to the hotel with Hicks, and engaged rooms for himself and Dr. Welcome; then he escaped the gathering crowd who wished to see their somewhat distinguished representative, and came and

walked in the grassy lane in front of the cottage. David came out and walked with him.

"You see," he explained, "in her clear spells she asks for your mother, and we thought she ought to come, if she would. Then when she's bad she asks for some one named Lila. We don't any of us know who Lila is."

La Grange knew, and he resolved she should have Lila, if such a thing were possible. He waited and took Dr. Welcome to the hotel.

The doctor was serious in manner, but communicative.

"I'm going to send for my good German nurse," he said. "The girl likes her, I know. Your mother mustn't sit up nights, and I don't want any people that Miss Hardy knows around her bed."

"Will she live?"

"I'll stay by her a few days," answered the doctor, "but she is a highly organized girl, high blood. I don't know, I won't know for a week."

La Grange Markham went to Forest Grove in the morning and talked to his constituents, and began on the task of clearing up his work preparatory to moving his office to Sacramento. But every morning Hicks would meet a solitary horseman on the divide, who rode up to the stage to receive the written message Mrs. Markham would send.

In a few days Dr. Welcome passed through, and his report lightened up the pale face of the eager questioner.

A week later he received a letter from his mother.

"She is better," it ran. "The Strongs are going out to their ranch. I am going to stay. I like it here, and if you will come down I can see more of you than in town. Go down to Sacramento, and send away the cook, and bring Satsuma up here. I am going to keep the German nurse. She can cook very well. Have Satsuma close the rooms, and Donovan knows all about taking care of everything. Tell Satsuma to bring his bed, a roll of smyrna rugs, a few china cups and saucers, half a dozen silver spoons and forks, and—"

La Grange ran to catch his train and gave the list his attention going down.

So it happened as the sick girl began to notice the birds singing on the roof, and the sounds below her in the rooms that she became used to the voice and step of La Grange in the house. And she noted it without question. Mrs. Markham had control of everything, and her son had a right to be there. Some days he would be gone and Mrs. Markham would come up and remark that her boy had gone to Forest Grove, but she had nothing further to say about him.

If the girl was always awake when it was time for the old stage to rumble up the lane in the evening, and listened with a brightened look on her face, Mrs. Markham seemed not to be aware of it.

The sunny day in the latter part of April, when the nurse first put her in a rocker at her window in her room, was bright as birds, and bees, and flowers, and the festivity of Spring could make it.

Over the brown porch roof Hulda could see a strip

of her garden with the rose trees arched over the gate, a mass of white bloom. She saw the lane fringed with grass and flowers, and beyond, the weather worn dwellings, all with roses clambering over and around them, and bowered in fruit trees. None of those houses had changed since she had gone away. The people seemed a trifle older, and the children had grown, that was all. It was home, and such sweet rest. She closed her eyes and when she opened them, Mrs. Markham stood before her with a cluster of great, heavy-headed roses, white, and crimson and pink, the old-fashioned roses her mother had loved.

She took them with a grateful glance and laid them against her cheek.

"Well, now, I'll not have Edward get you any more, if you are going to cry over them."

The girl lowered them into her lap.

"Oh, Auntie, forgive me, my mother's roses!"

Then it seemed but a few days, till she came down stairs dressed in a long, trailing, cream-colored wrapper, with a cloudy pink scarf about her shoulders. She wanted to sit in the kitchen door in the morning sun, and that was where Satsuma took her rocker. Mrs. Markham sat in her chair outside, and Satsuma hovered around, his face wreathed in smiles.

It seemed but incidental that Mrs. Markham's son should come by. He had a spade in his hand.

"Ah!" he said, in the most ordinary way, "glad to see you down." Then he sat on the step facing his mother. "Well, now, Miss Hardy," he said after a

moment, "tell us how you like our housekeeping. Haven't we done well? I've nailed on, I don't know how many pickets, and spaded the garden and pruned your roses, and now I'm thinking of plowing the orchard."

"Do you call that housekeeping?" said his mother, and Hulda smiled, the pink creeping over her cheeks.

"David said he would have it plowed," she said quietly.

"Then I think I will build a barn," La Grange continued.

"A barn!" cried both women.

"Yes, I want a saddle horse. The stage starts too early for me."

"You're talking nonsense," said Mrs. Markham. "Now go off to your spading."

He understood that to be orders to go, and he went. Later he came in with a bunch of wild flowers and laid them in Hulda's lap as he went by, and with this manner of easy nonchalance and pleasant insistence, he came into the girl's life again, and their acquaintance seemed to begin just where it had really ended on their last meeting in Cherry Valley.

Then life in the little Hardup home went on like a dream. Hulda gained strength among her roses, or walking around the village talking to her old friends. Some days La Grange would be away, some days he would have the dining-room table littered with his correspondence, or he would read to the two women, on the porch under the roses. They liked to have him read the editorials in the papers, and tell them why they had been written.

Mrs. Markham and her son spoke of returning to Sacramento, when he would be ready to open his law office there, but nothing was said to Hulda about her returning with them, and she was glad. It would be a lonely day the day that they should go, but she could see her way clear as to her future life in Hardup.

One warm day she went out among her beloved pines, and beyond in an open place, where the poppies grew flaming in a perfumed sheet over the field. She wore a soft white dress, and when she came back the poppies were fastened at her belt and throat, and lying in her arms.

She came musing leisurely around to the front of her house scattering poppies as she walked. Then she suddenly dropped them all in a golden mass, and ran through the rose avenue to the front gate. Had Mrs. Woods come?

There was Lila tied to the post, her nose in the grass, and just as she used to be, but for the new saddle and bridle upon her. A card hung from the horse, and the wondering girl took it in her hand. "To you, Dacie, from Mrs. Markham and her son."

The girl slipped her arms around the pony's neck, and rested her head upon her. A long time she stood there, with a throbbing heart. Then taking the card, she went in and found Mrs. Markham.

"Auntie, I can't accept such a present." Mrs. Markham looked up from her book.

"I can't help it, Edward bought her."

"Then you can give it to Archie." Mrs. Markham caught the girl's dress and drew her down to her.

"Dacie, didn't you find us for each other?"

"Yes, but I can't accept pay for it, neither will I allow you to pay Dr. Welcome and the nurse."

"Oh, that isn't it, Dacie, we love you for it."

"I know you do, Auntie," murmured the girl, "but your son has no right to give me presents, and I must not accept them."

"Well, then you must talk to him about it. You never object when Archie gives you things. There, you've got a lace handkerchief in your pocket now that Archie sent last week."

The girl hid her face in the elder woman's lap. It was rosy with blushes. Mrs. Markham waited a while, then, in pity she lifted the face and kissed the white brow.

"Go now, don't trouble me about it. Go and have a ride, and if you want, I will buy the horse from Edward and give it to Archie."

The girl was glad to go away with her blushes. She ran to her room and looked at Lila from her window. The temptation was too great. She opened her old trunk and took out her old habit and the riding cap, that she had worn on that fatal snowy ride from Forest Grove. She had to change her coils of hair, and the cap would not cover all her curls. She found a bit of thin veiling to tie them down. She came down the stairs so softly that Mrs. Markham did not hear, and Satsuma, reading in the garden, only saw her as she rode away. Another rider came up shortly after.

"Which way did she go, Satsuma?"

Satsuma pointed out past the schoolhouse. The second rider went on; there was but one road that way. Later he rode down a slope and came to a broad, running stream with shallow water rippling over the pebbles. Lila and her rider were down the stream a ways. She had ridden down the bank and was pulling ferns from over her head. The horseman came through the ripples to her, but he saw that he was observed.

"May I not get them for you?" he asked, reining his horse close to her.

She turned Lila's head and her own, away. "You are very kind, Mr. Markham."

He rode in between her and the bank and began to reach for the objects of her desire. He only pulled one at a time, however, and troubled her to take them severally. But the third one was not a fern, and she threw it away.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "how can you expect me to know a fern from a brake? Tell me how you like Lila."

"It's glorious to be on her again," she said dropping her eyes, "but I can't accept her from you. I will buy her of you."

"Very well," answered La Grange, with his old coolness. "I think we can easily make terms. I have something that belongs to you, that I will take in exchange." She looked at him in surprise. "Only it is not an equal exchange. There will be about three hundred dollars coming to you. Let me see. Lila and her saddle are worth about one hundred dol-

lars, and the picture I want is worth at least four hundred. I have it in my room at Sacramento. It is called 'L' Adieu.'" He reached and caught her hand. "God bless you for painting that picture, Dacie. When I saw it I knew that at some time you cared for me."

Her face was turned away, but he did not release her hand. "May I have the picture?"

Her head was so bowed that he just caught the words. "No, I can't sell the picture."

"Give it to me then."

"No, I cannot do that."

He dropped her hand and then guided his horse out.

"Were you going up to Strong's?"

"I was going that way," she said.

"Very well, perhaps I may go too."

She turned to him with flashing eyes as they rode up out of the stream.

"You had no right to take that canvas out of the garret. How did you know it was there?"

He rallied bravely to his own defense.

"I had to fix reservoirs in your absence. I found it accidentally. Why didn't you stay and protect it?"

She made no reply, and they went on.

"I suppose," he said bitterly, cracking his whip viciously in the air, "that you will always look upon me as a man who alters credits and tells lies. My case is quite hopeless, I know that."

"But oh, Mr. Markham, I didn't say that," she cried, turning for one moment her shining eyes to him. His face changed. He lowered his whip, and came closer to her.



“Oh, Edward, I have loved you always, always.”

"Then, dear girl, why don't you let me tell you how I love you. Don't I actually deserve you more than mother does?"

She let him take her hand while she glanced up archly.

"And why, sir?"

"A prior claim—an attachment, and an old one, too." He took hope when he saw her sudden blushes.

"And now," he said, wheeling the horses about, "we are not going up to Strongs. I am going to serve that attachment, or I am no lawyer."

But she had recovered her presence of mind, and the serving of the attachment was not so easy, although he pleaded his case eloquently.

Kind dusk had fallen when they reached the house. But when he took her from the saddle, he imprisoned her head against his shoulder, and kissed her cheek and lips.

"Oh, Edward, I have loved you always, always."

"Darling," he said looking into her eyes, "now we can talk over those dear old days. I once thought I would have no time for love making, now, dearest, I shall have no time for anything else."

Mrs. Markham met them at the door.

"It's all right, mother," he said, "I've traded the horse for a picture."

"Oh, you silly children," she exclaimed, drawing Hulda from his embracing arm into the house. "Go put those horses up, Edward, tea is waiting." Then she embraced the girl and kissed her lovingly. "Now my happiness is complete," she said.

But there was not much eaten at that tea. La Grange sat idling with his fork, and looking at the girl in a creamy white dress, a mass of poppies on her breast, whose soul shone in her face now, and whose eyes were lifted with the old bright frankness, as in the Cherry Valley days.

Mrs. Markham reclined in her rocker, holding and petting "her Dacie's" hand. Not on that first deliriously happy evening, or at any other time, was she jealous of the young people's abstraction in each other. She let them take horse back rides and talk interminably in the moonlight in the rose garden.

But after a week or so she insisted upon a hearing. Things could not always go on that way. There were arrangements to be made.

But Hulda had already decided on one thing; that she would remain for the present in the home of her childhood, and be married in the Hardup church, surrounded by the people who had known and loved her mother.

"Then I set the time for the middle of June," said Mrs. Markham, decidedly, "so that Archie and all of us can go to Monterey."

This decided upon, Mrs. Markham and her son went on their long-deferred trip to Rocky Divide. Mrs. La Grange and her children, the eldest, a sturdy boy of sixteen, were brought down from the Divide by them, and settled in Forest Grove, where the school facilities were good. Mrs. Markham felt that she owed the children something for having taken away their foster brother. Her obligations were fulfilled as

much as John Ellis would allow, for after a year or so he married the widow and took the six children to his paternal heart.

Hulda, at Hardup, kept the German woman, took in a village girl as companion, and lived till her wedding day in the now doubly precious home of her childhood. But she had a studio added to the cottage and allowed David to enlarge the orchard. She had decided to keep the old place for a summer home and rest resort, whenever they might wish to come to it.

Mrs. Cornman came down from Forest Grove with Hicks one night. Hulda took her in graciously and forgivingly. She staid a week, then seemed loath to go away. In one of Hulda's daily letters to her lover, she said: "There is no use for me to try to harbor resentment against any one, I can't do it, especially in these happy days."

La Grange smiled over this, and then laughed heartily over one he had received from David Strong, in which he told of a little fun they had been having in Forest Grove. It seems that Hicks had been getting drunk. In this irresponsible condition he had met Joseph Cornman, arrayed in a spotless linen duster, and incidentally or accidentally, the tipsy man had fallen against the "dictionary old maid," and rolled him into a mud hole that existed perpetually by a saloon watering trough. As this was the only spree Hicks had ever been known to indulge in, people wondered, and David, any way, saw the point.

So much fun, however, was made of the unfortu-

nate pedagogue, that he was glad to remove from town, and when he ran for the County Suprintendency, he was surprised to note that the saloon element had defeated him.

Despite Hulda's protest Mrs. Markham continued to amuse herself planning and ordering dresses for her ward's trousseau. Hulda had to submit graciously, and take little trips down to Sacramento to have them fitted. She knew they would be appropriate in the hospitable home she would keep with the dear new mother in the old Markham mansion.

But the wedding dress itself was purchased and made in Hardup, and the Hardup women were happy. The dress was of fine white tulle, flowing in long draperies, and trailing as the fond Hardup women would have it, a yard or more on the ground. But it was finally trimmed at the last moment, with the orange blossoms that Archie sent by express, and Cis hung around the bride a rich shimmering veil, that could not be refused from David. The bride walked through the pines to the church on David's arm, Cis and Millie followed, laughter and merriment mingled with their decorum.

The old church bell hanging on its time-blackened frame by the church-yard gate, filled the air with its sweet and mellow tones, and all Hardup, seemingly, was crowded into the new church.

Late arrivals from Cherry Valley waited to catch a glimpse of the bride, and Hicks drove up with a crowd from Forest Grove, for the public wedding of so popular a man was a drawing attraction.

Archie as best man, and demure little Lucy Welcome as bride's-maid conducted the bride and David down the aisle to the altar, where Mrs. Markham in shimmering silk waited with her son.

The simple Methodist ceremony followed, and the gentle, great-hearted girl, whose soul was clear as light, and whose hand had never refused aid or comfort to any who suffered or needed her, placed her life in her lover's keeping, and knew that it would be blessed with every gracious gift of his love, and the bounties of his noble hand.

"And what God has joined together, no man is able to put asunder," said the good pastor, as he gave them his blessing, and many there with moistened eyes, said "Amen."

THE END.

VADE MECUM

Compiled and Arranged by **D. B. DIXON**, with a most exhaustive Electrical Department by **THOS. G. GRIER**, a prominent specialist.

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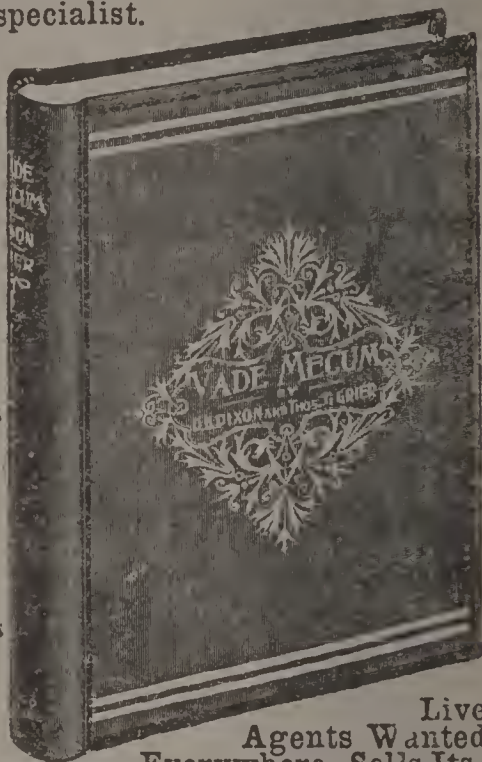
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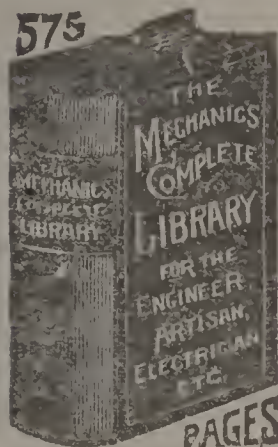
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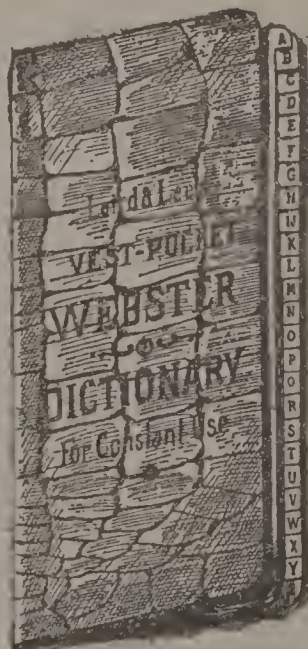
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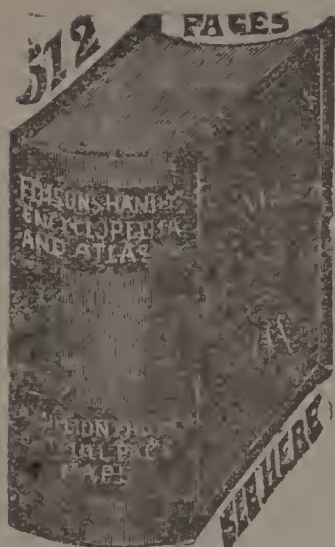
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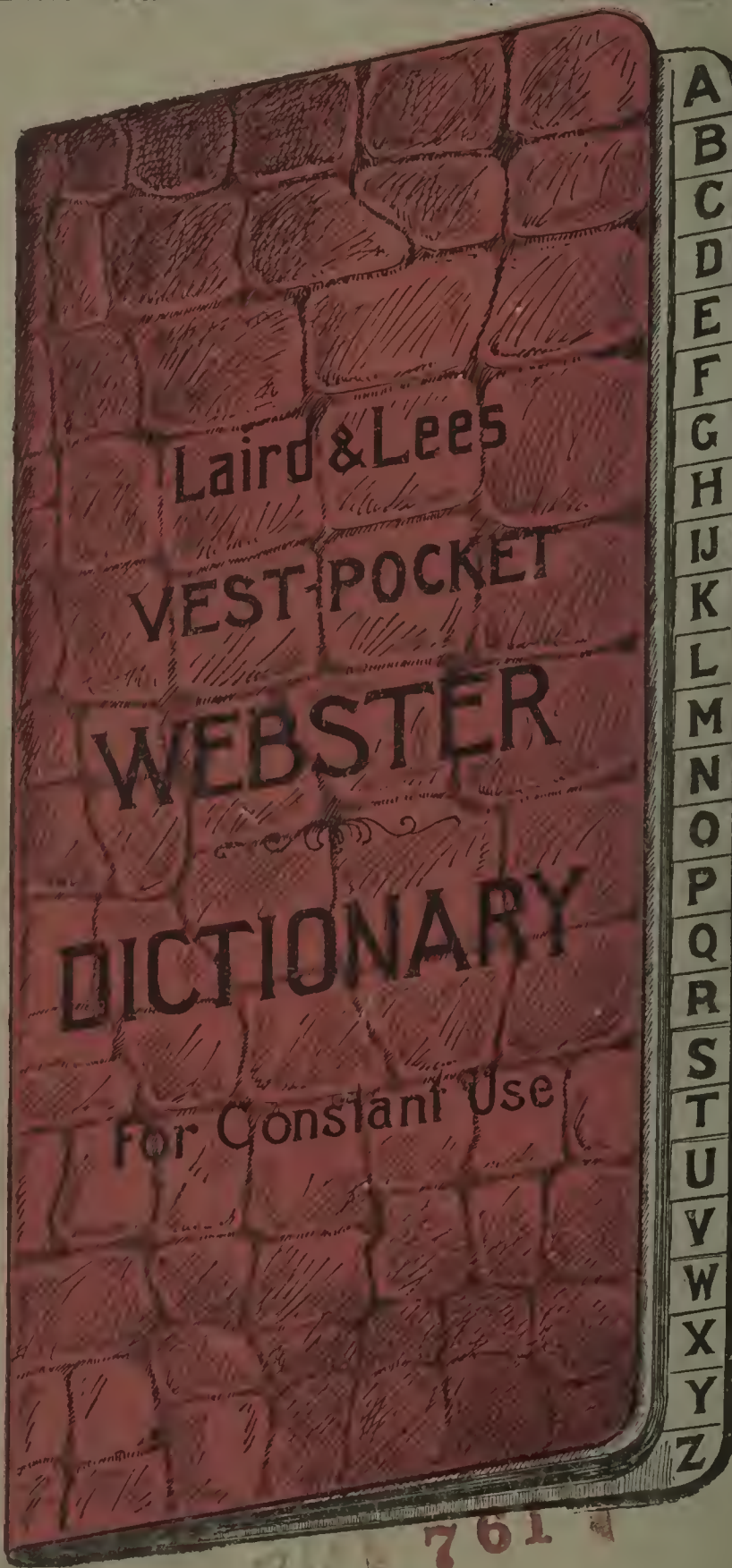
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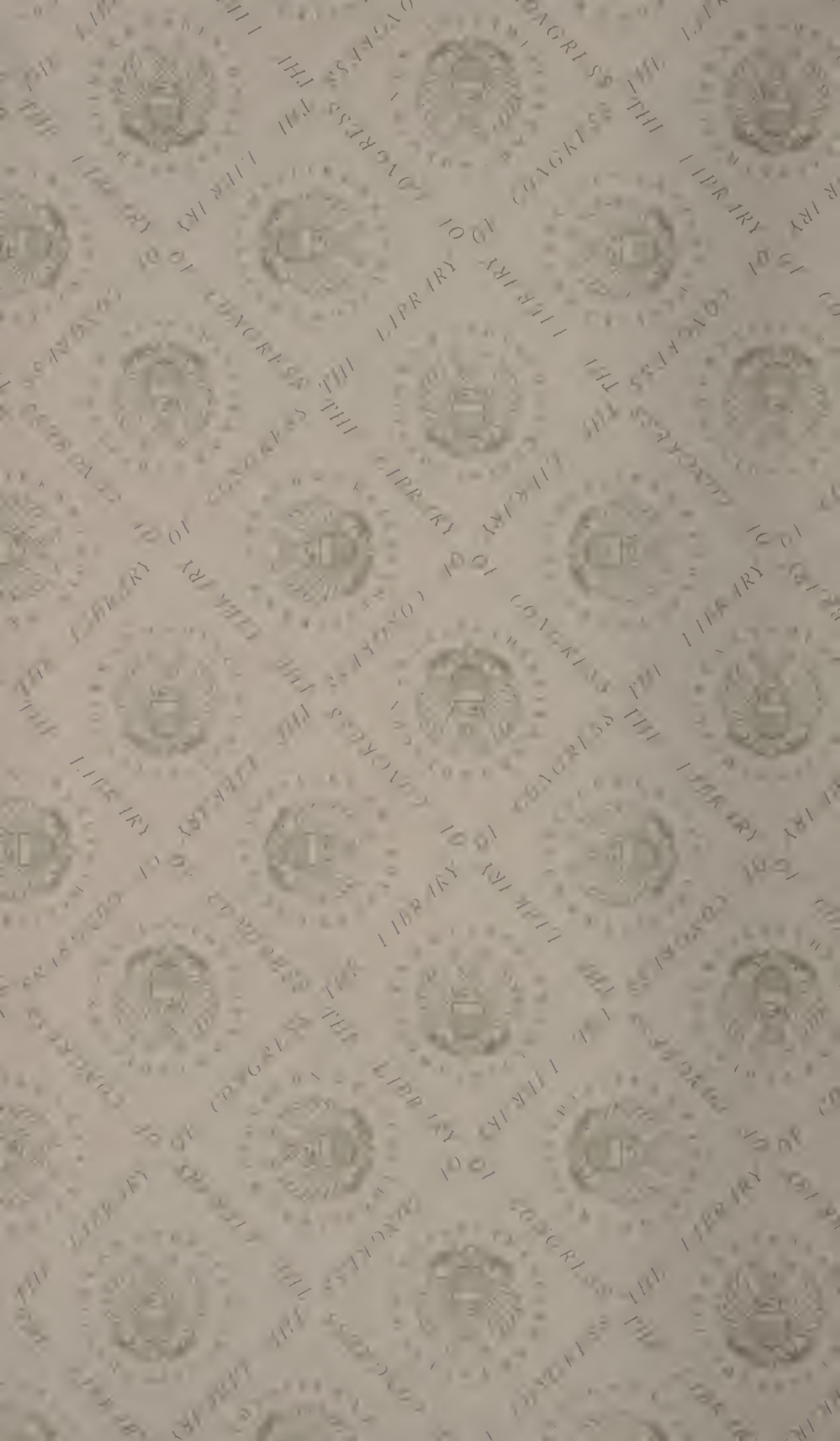
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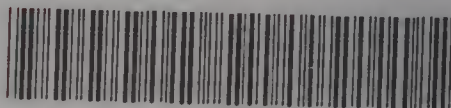
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